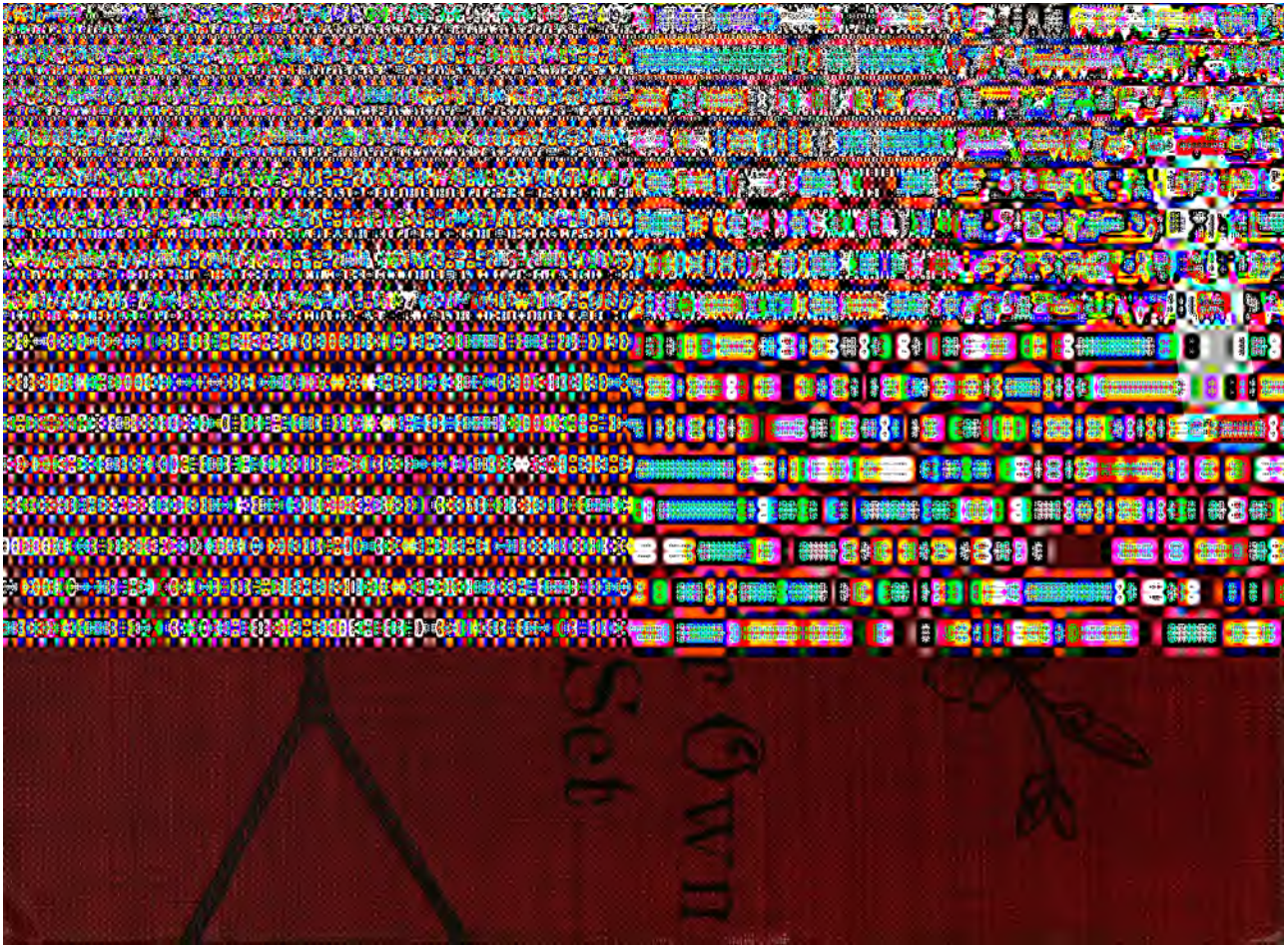

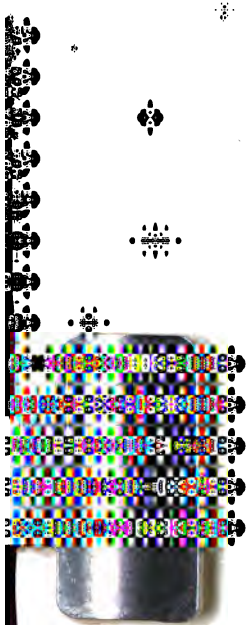

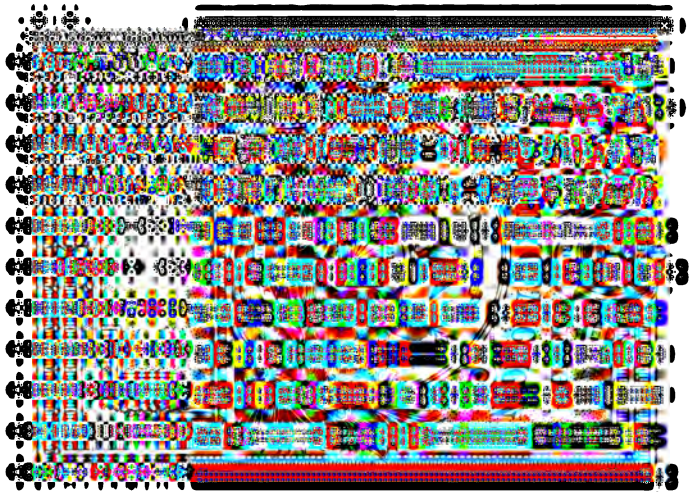

OUR OWN SET

A NOVEL

BY

OSSIP SCHUBIN pseud.
Kirschner, Lula

FROM THE GERMAN BY CLARA BELL

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OUR OWN SET.

PART I.

THE CARNIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

AT Rome in 1870. Roman society was already divided into "*Le Monde noir*" and "*Le Monde blanc*" which as yet gave no sign of amalgamation into a "*Monde gris.*" His Holiness the Pope had entrenched himself in the Vatican behind his prestige of martyrdom; and the King already held his court at the Quirinal.

Among the distinguished Austrians who were spending the winter in Rome were the Otto Ilsenberghs. Otto Ilsenbergh, one of the leading members of the Austrian feudal aristocracy, was in Rome professedly for his health, but in reality solely in order to avail himself of the resources of the Vatican library in compiling that work on the History of Miracle which he has lately given to

the world under a quaint pseudonym. He and his wife with a troup of red-haired Ilsenberghs, big and little, inhabited a straggling, historical palazzo on the Corso, with a glacial stone staircase and vast drawing-rooms which looked more fit for the meetings of conspirators than for innocent tea-drinkings and dances.

The countess was "at home" every evening when there was no better amusemeut to be had. She was by birth a princess Auerstein, of the Auerstein-Zolling branch, in which — as we all know — the women are remarkable for their white eyebrows and their strict morality. The Ilsenbergh *salon* was much frequented; the prevailing tone was by no means formal; smoking was allowed in the drawing-room — nay the countess herself smoked: to be precise she smoked *regalias*.

It was in the beginning of December; a wet evening and the heavy drops splashed against the window panes. Count Ilsenbergh was sitting in an immense reception-room decorated with frescoes, at a *buhl* table, evidently constructed for no more arduous duties than the evolution of love letters. He was absorbed in the concoction of an article for "Our Times." A paper of strictly aristocratic-conservative tendencies, patronized by himself, taken in by his fellow-aristocrats, but read

by absolutely no one—excepting the liberal newspaper writers when in search of reactionary perversities. Count Ilsenbergh was in great trouble; the Austrian Ministry had crowned their distinguished achievements by one even more distinguished — for the fourth time within three years a new era was announced, and in defiance of prejudice a spick-and-span liberal ministry was being composed, destined no doubt to establish the prosperity of the Austrian people on a permanent basis — and beyond a doubt to cause a fresh importation of "Excellencies" into the fashionable *salons* of the Ringstrasse at Vienna. Count Ilsenbergh was prophesying the end of all things.

The countess was sitting at her ease on a sofa close to the fire-place, with its Renaissance chimæras of white marble. The handsomest editions of the works of Ampère and Mommsen lay on the tables, but she held on her lap a ragged volume of a novel from a circulating library. She was a tall, fair woman with a high color and apricot-colored hair, a languid figure, slender extremities and insignificant features; she spoke French and German alike with a strong Viennese accent, dressed unfashionably, and moved awkwardly; still, no one who knew what was what, could fail to see that she

was a lady and an aristocrat. At all court functions she was an imposing figure, she never stumbled over her train and wore the family diamonds with stately indifference.

The portière was lifted and General von Klinger was announced. General von Klinger was an old Austrian soldier whose good fortune it had been to have an opportunity of distinguishing himself with his cavalry at Sadowa, after which, righteously wroth at the national disaster, he had laid down his sword and retired with his General's rank to devote himself wholly to painting. Even as a soldier he had enjoyed a reputation as a genius and had covered himself with glory by the way in which he could sketch, with his gold-cased pencil on the back of an old letter or a visiting-card, a galloping horse and a jockey bending over its mane; a work of art especially admired for the rapidity with which it was executed. Since then he had studied art in Paris, had three times had his pictures refused at the *salon* and had succeeded in persuading himself that this was a distinction — in which he found a parallel in Rousseau, Delacroix and fifty fellow-victims who had been obliged to submit to a similar rebuff. Then he had come to Rome, an unappreciated genius, and had established himself in a magnificent studio in the

Piazza Navona, which he threw open to the public every day from three till five and which became a popular rendezvous for the fashionable world. They laughed at the old soldier's artistic pretensions, but they could not laugh at him. He was in every sense of the word a gentleman. Like many an old bachelor who cherishes the memory of an unsuccessful love affair in early life, he covered a sentimental vein by a biting tongue — a pessimist idealist perhaps describes him. He was handsome and upright, with a stiffly starched shirt collar and romantic dark eyes—a thorough old soldier and a favorite with all the fine ladies of Roman society.

"It is very nice of you to have thought of us," said the countess greeting him heartily; "it is dreadful weather too — come and warm yourself."

The count looked up from his writing: "How are you General?" he said, and then went on with his article, adding: "Such an old friend as you are will allow me to go on with my work; only a few lines — half a dozen words. These are grave times, when every man must hold his own in the ranks!"—and the forlorn hope of the feudal cause dipped his pen in the ink with a sigh.

The general begged him not to disturb himself,

the countess said a few words about some musical soirée, and presently her husband ended his page with an emphatic flourish, exclaiming: "That will give them something to think about!" and came to join them by the fire.

A carriage was heard to draw up in the street.

"That may be Truyn, he arrived yesterday," observed the countess, and Count Truyn was in fact announced.

Erich Truyn was at that time a man of rather more than thirty with hair prematurely gray and a glance of frosty indifference. People said he had been iced, for he always looked as though he had been frozen to the marrow in sublime superiority; his frigid exterior had won him a reputation for excessive pride, and totally belied the man. He was an uncommonly kind and noble-hearted soul, and what passed for pride was merely the shrinking of a sensitive nature which had now and again exposed itself to ridicule, perhaps by some outburst of high-flown idealism, and which now sought only to hide its sanctuary from the desecration of the multitude.

"Ah! Truyn, at last, and how are you?" cried the countess with sincere pleasure.

"Much as ever," replied Truyn.

"And where is your wife?" asked Ilsenbergh.

"I do not know."

"Is she still at Nice?"

"I do not know." And as he spoke his expression was colder and more set than before.

"Are you to be long in Rome?" said the countess, anxious to divert the conversation into a more pleasing channel.

"As long as my little companion likes and it suits her," answered Truyn. His 'little companion' always meant his only child, a girl of about twelve.

"You must bring Gabrielle to see me very soon," said the lady. "My Mimi and Lintschi are of the same age."

"I will bring her as soon as possible; unluckily she is so very shy she cannot bear strangers. But she has quite lost her heart to the general and to our cousin Sempaly."

"What, Nicki!" exclaimed the countess. "Do you mean that he has the patience to devote himself to children?"

"He has a peculiar talent for it. He dined with us to-day."

"He is an unaccountable creature!" sighed the countess. "He hardly ever comes near us."

At this moment a quick step was heard outside and Count Sempaly was announced.

"*Lupus in Fabula!*" remarked Ilsenbergh.

The new-comer was a young man of eight or nine and twenty, not tall, but powerfully though slightly built; his remarkably handsome, well-cut features and clear brown complexion were beautified by a most engaging smile, and by fine blue eyes with dark lashes and shaded lids. Under cover of that smile he could say the most audacious things, and whether the glance of those eyes were a lightning flash or a sunbeam no one had ever been quite certain. He gallantly kissed the tips of the countess's fingers, nodded to the men with a sort of brusque heartiness, and then seated himself on a cushion at the lady's feet.

"Well, it is a mercy to be allowed to see you at last; you really do not come often enough, Nicki; and in society I hardly ever meet you," complained the countess in a tone of kindly reproof. "Why do you so seldom appear in the respectable world?"

"Because he is better amused in the other world!" said Ilsenbergh with a giggle in an undertone.

But a reproachful glance from his wife warned him to be sober.

"I simply have not the time for it," said Sempaly half laughing. "I have too much to do."

"Too much to do!" said Truyn with his quiet irony. . . "In diplomacy?—What is the latest news?"

"A remarkable article in the '*Temps*' on the great washing-basin question," replied Sempaly with mock gravity.

"The washing-basin question!" repeated the others puzzled.

"Yes," continued Sempaly. "The state of affairs is this: When, not long since, the young duke of B. . . was required to serve under the conscription, his feelings were deeply hurt by the fact that he had not only to live in barracks, but to wash at the pump like a common soldier. This so outraged his mamma that she went to the Minister of War to petition that her son might have a separate washing-basin; but after serious discussion her application was refused. It was decided that this separate washing-basin would be a breach of the Immortal Principles of '89."

"It is hardly credible!" observed Truyn; Ilsenbergh shrugged his shoulders and the countess innocently asked:

"What are the immortal principles of '89?"

"A sort of ideal convention between the aristocracy and the canaille," said Sempaly coolly. "Or if you prefer it, the first steps towards the

abdication of privilege at the feet of the higher humanity," he added with a smile.

The countess was no wiser than before, Sempaly laughed maliciously as he fanned himself with a Japanese screen, and Ilsenbergh said: "Then you are a democrat, Sempaly?"

"From a bird's-eye point of view," added Truyn drily; he had not much faith in his cousin's liberalism.

"I am always a democrat when I have just been reading 'The Dark Ages,'" said Sempaly—'The Dark Ages' was the name he chose to give to Ilsenbergh's newspaper. — "Besides, joking apart, I am really a liberal, though I own I am uneasy at the growing power of the radicals. By the bye, I had nearly forgotten to give you two items of news that will delight you Fritzi," — addressing the countess. "The reds have won all the Paris elections, and at Madrid they have been shooting at the king."

"Horrible!" exclaimed the countess, and she shuddered, "we shall see the Commune again before long."

"'93," said Truyn, with his tone of dry irony.

"We really ought to draw a cordon round the Austrian throne to protect it against the pestilential flood of democracy," said Sempaly very

gravely. "Ilsenbergh you must petition the upper house."

"Your jokes are very much out of place," said the countess, "the matter is serious."

"Oh, no! not for us," said Truyn. "Our people are too long suffering."

"They are sound at the core," interrupted Ilsenbergh with dramatic emphasis.

"They do not yet know the meaning of liberty," said Sempaly laughing, "and to them equality is a mere abstraction — a metaphysical delicacy."

"They are thoroughly good and loyal!" exclaimed Ilsenbergh, "and they know. . ."

"Oh!" cried Sempaly, "they know very little and that is your safeguard. When once their eyes are opened your life will cease to be secure. If I had been a bricklayer I should certainly have been a socialist," and he crossed his arms and looked defiantly at his audience.

"A socialist!" cried Ilsenbergh indignantly. "You! — never. No, you could not have been a socialist; your religious feelings would have preserved you from such wickedness!"

"Hm!" replied Sempaly suspiciously, and Truyn said with a twist of his lips:

"As a bricklayer Sempaly might not have

been so religious; he might have found some difficulty in worshipping a God who had treated him so scurvily."

"Hush, Truyn!" exclaimed Sempaly, somewhat anxiously to his cousin. "You know I dislike all such discussions.

"True. I remember you wear Catholic blinkers and are always nervous about your beliefs; and you would not like to feel any doubt as to the unlimited prolongation of your comfortable little existence," said Truyn in a tone of grave and languid banter. For Sempaly was not burthened with religion, though, like many folks to whom life is easy, he clung desperately to a hope in a future life, for which reason he affected "Catholic blinkers" and would not have opened a page of Strauss for the world.

"The sword is at our breast!" sighed the countess still sunk in dark forebodings. "This new ministry! . . ." And she shook her head.

"It will do no harm beyond producing a few dreary articles in the papers and inundating us with new Acts which the crown will not trouble itself about for a moment," observed Sempaly.

"The Austrian mob are gnashing their teeth already!" said the lady.

"Nonsense! The Austrian mob is a very good

dog at bottom; it will not bite till you forbid it to lick your hands," said her cousin calmly.

"I should dislike one as much as the other," said the countess, looking complacently at her slender white fingers.

"But tell us, Nicki," asked Ilsenbergh, "has not the change of ministry put a stop to your chances of promotion?" Sempaly was in fact an apprentice in the Roman branch of the great Austrian political incubator.

"Of course," replied Sempaly. "I had hoped to be sent to London as secretary; but one of our secretaries here is to go to England, and the democrats are sending us one of their own protégés in his place. My chief told me so this morning."

"Oh! who is our new secretary?" asked the countess much interested. "If he is a protégé of those creatures he must be a terrible specimen."

"He is one Sterzl—and highly recommended; he comes from Teheran where he has distinguished himself greatly," said Sempaly.

"Sterzl!" repeated Ilsenbergh scornfully.

"Sterzl!" cried the lady in disgust. "It is to be hoped he has no wife,—that would crown all."

"On that point I can reassure you," said the general; "Sterzl is unmarried."

"You know him?" murmured the countess slightly abashed.

"He is the son of one of my dearest friends—a fellow-officer," replied the general, "and if he has grown up as he promised he must be a man of talent and character — his abilities were brilliant."

"That is something at any rate," Ilsenbergh condescended to say.

"Yes, so it strikes me," added Sempaly; "we require one man who knows what work means."

"I was promised that my nephew should have the appointment," muttered the countess. "It is disgusting!"

"Utterly!" said Sempaly with a whimsical intonation. "A foreign element is always intrusive; we are much more comfortable among ourselves."

Tea was now brought in on a Japanese table and the secretary and his inferior birth were for the time forgotten.

CHAPTER II.

SEMPALY was not merely affecting the democrat to annoy his cousin the countess; he firmly believed himself to be a liberal because he laughed at conservatism, and regarded the nobility as a time-honored structure — a relic of the past, like the pyramids, only not quite so perdurable. But in spite of his theoretical respect for the rights of man and his satirical contempt for the claims of privilege, Sempaly was really less tolerant than his cousin of "the dark ages." Ilsenbergh, with all his feudal crotchets, was an aristocrat only from a sense of fitness while Sempaly was an aristocrat by instinct; Ilsenbergh's pride of rank was an affair of party and dignity, Sempaly's was a matter of superfine nerves.

A few days after this conversation Sempaly met the general and told him that the new secretary had arrived, adding with a smile: "I do not think he will do!"

"Why not?" asked the general.

"He speaks very bad French and he knows nothing about *bric-à-brac*," replied Sempaly with

perfect gravity. "I introduced him yesterday to Madame de Gandry and he had hardly turned his back when she asked me — she is the daughter of a leather-seller at Lille, you know — 'is he a man of family?' — and would you believe it, I could not tell her. That is the sort of thing I never know." Then he added with a singular smile: "His name is Cecil — Cecil Maria. Cecil Maria Sterzl! It sounds well do not you think?"

Cecil Maria! It was a ridiculous name and ill-suited the man. His father had been an officer of dragoons who had retired early to become a country gentleman — the dearest dream of the retired officer; his mother was a faded Fräulein von . . . . who had all her linen — not merely for her trousseau but all she ever purchased—marked with *her* coronet, who stuck up a flag on the turret of their little country house with *her* arms, and insisted on being addressed as baroness — which she never had been — by all her acquaintance. When, within a year of her marriage, she became the mother of a fine boy it was a burning question what his name should be.

"Cecil Maria," lisped the lady.

"Nonsense! The boy shall be called Anthony after his grandfather," said his father, and the mother burst into tears. What man can resist the

tears of the mother of his first-born? The child was christened Cecil.

His father died at the early age of forty; his youngest child, a little girl whom he worshipped, was dangerously ill of scarlet fever and he fell a victim to his devotion to her. Cecil was at that time a pretty but rather delicate boy, with an intense contempt for the French language which his sister's governess tried to instil into him, and a pronounced preference for the society of the stable-lads and peasant boys; the baroness was always complaining that he was dirty and did not care to keep his hands white. The guardianship of the orphans devolved on General Sterzl, their father's elder brother, who honestly did his best for them, managing their little fortune with care, and conscientiously directing their education. After a brief but keen inspection of the clever spoilt boy, of his silly mother, and of his cringing tutor, he shrugged his shoulders over this country gentleman's life and placed the lad in the *Theresianum*, a college which in the estimation of every Austrian officer is the first educational establishment in the world—provided, that is to say, that he himself was not brought up there.

During the first six months Cecil was boundlessly miserable. All his life long till now he had

been accustomed to be first; and it was hard suddenly to find himself last. Although his abilities were superior his neglected education placed him far below most of his companions, and besides this he was, as it happened, the only boy not of noble birth in this fashionable college, with the exception of a young Tyrolese whose descent was illegitimate, though he nevertheless was always boasting of his famlly. Then his companions laughed at his provincial accent, at his want of strength and at his queer name. We have all in our turn had to submit to this rough jesting. He could not for a long time get accustomed to it, and during the first half-year he incessantly plagued his mother and guardian to release him from what he called a prison; but they remained deaf to his entreaties. The visible outcome, when Cecil went home for the summer holidays, was a very subdued frame of mind, and nicely kept, long white nails. The next term began with his giving a sound thrashing to the odious Tyrolese who bored the whole school with his endless bragging and airs. This made him immensely popular; then he began to work in earnest; his masters praised his industry — and his complaints ceased. Had the subtle poison of pretentious vanity which infected the whole college crept into his veins? Had he begun to find

a charm in hearing Mass read on Sundays and Highdays by a Bishop? To be waited on by servants in livery, to learn to dance from the same teacher who gave lessons at court, and to call the titled youth of the empire '*du*'? It is difficult to say. He seemed perfectly indifferent to all these privileges and assumed no airs or affectations.—His pride was of a fiercer temper.

He finished his education by learning eastern languages, passed brilliantly, and, still aided by his uncle, went in for diplomacy. He was sent to an Asiatic capital which was just then undergoing a visitation of cholera and revolution; there again he distinguished himself and was decorated with the order of the Iron Crown.

One thing was soon very evident to every one in Rome: The new secretary was not a man whose character could be summed up in an epigram. There was nothing commonplace or pretty in the man. Externally he was tall and broad shouldered, with a well set carriage that gave him the air of a soldier in *mufti;* his hair was brown and close-cropped and his features sharply cut. In manner he was awkward but perfectly well-bred, unpretentious and simple. The ambassador's verdict on the new secretary was very different from Sempaly's. "He is my best worker," said

his excellency: "A wonderful worker, and a long head — extraordinarily capable; but not pliant enough — not pliant enough. . . ."

Nor was it only with his superiors that he found favor; the younger officials with whom he came in contact were soon on the best terms with him. He had one peculiarity, very rare in men who take life so seriously as he did: He never quibbled. The embassy at Rome at that time swarmed to such an extent with handsome, fashionable idlers that the Palazzo di Venezia was like a superior school for fine ladies with moustaches — as Sempaly aptly said. Sterzl looked on at their feeble doings with indulgent good humor; it was impossible to hope for any definite views or action from these young gentlemen; it would have been as wise to try to make butterflies do the work of ants. He himself was always ready to make good their neglect and gave them every liberty for their amusements. He wished to work, to make his mark — that was his business; to fritter away life and enjoy themselves was theirs. Thus they agreed to admiration.

But though his subalterns were soon his devoted allies, society at large was still disposed to offer him a cold shoulder. His predecessor in office had never pretended to do anything note-

worthy as a diplomatist, but he had been an admirable waltzer, and — which was even more important — he had not disdained that social diversion; consequently he had been a favorite with the ladies of Rome who loudly bewailed his departure and were not cordial to his successor. Sterzl took no pains to fill his place; he had no trace of that obsequious politeness and superficial amiability which make a man popular in general society. His blunt conscientiousness and quite pedantic frankness of speech were displeasing on first acquaintance. In a drawing-room he commonly stood silently observant, or, if he spoke, he said exactly what he thought and expected the same sincerity from others. He could never be brought to understand that the flattery and subterfuge usual in company were merely a degenerate form of love for your neighbor; that the uncompromising truthfulness that he required must result in universal warfare; that the limit-line between sincerity and rudeness, between deference and hypocrisy, have never been rigidly defined; that the naked truth is as much out of place in a drawing-room as a man in his shirt-sleeves; and that, considering the defects and deformities of our souls, we cannot be too thankful that custom prohibits their being displayed

without a decent amount of clothing. Merciful Heaven! what should we see if they were laid bare?

No, we cannot live without lying. A man who is used to society demands that it should tell lies, it is his right, and a courtesy to which he has every claim. When a man finds that society no longer thinks him worth lying to his part is played out and he had better vanish from the scene. In short, Sterzl had no sort of success with women; they dubbed him by the nickname of '*le Paysan du Danube.*' Men respected him; they only regretted that he had so many extravagant notions, particularly a morbid touchiness as to matters of honor; however, that is a fault which men do not seriously disapprove of. To Sterzl himself it was a matter of entire indifference what was said of him by people who were not his personal friends. For a friend he would go through fire and water, but he would often neglect even to bow to an acquaintance in the street as he walked on, straight to his destination, his head full of grand schemes. He was fully determined to make his mark: to do — perhaps to become — something great. . . . but. . . .

CHAPTER III.

PRINCESS VULPINI, who had not escaped the fashionable complaint — the *Morbus Schliemanniensis*, had found a treasure no further off than in an old-clothes shop in the Via Aracoeli, where she had bought two wonderful shields from designs, she was assured, of Benvenuto Cellini's and a fragment of tapestry said to have been designed by Raphael, and she had invited a few intimate friends — Truyn, Sempaly, von Klinger, and Count Siegburg, an Austrian *attaché*, to give their opinion as to the genuineness of her find. She was Truyn's sister and a few years younger than he; she had met Prince Vulpini at Vichy when spending a season there with her invalid father and soon afterwards had married him, and now for twelve years she had lived in Rome, loving it well, though she never ceased railing at it for sundry inconveniences, was always singing the praises of Vienna and would have all her shopping done for her "at home" because she was convinced that nothing was to be had in Rome but photographs, antiques and wax-matches.

The company had just finished a lively dinner, throughout which they had unanimously abused the new Italian Ministry; but with the arrival of the coffee and cigarettes they turned to the consideration of the princess's antiquities which she had spread out on the floor for inspection. The gentlemen threw themselves on all-fours to examine the arras and the shields, and pronounced their verdict with conscientious frankness. No one, it seemed, was thoroughly convinced of the authenticity of the treasures but the Countess Marie Schalingen, a lady who had been for some few weeks in Rome as the princess's guest; all the others had doubts. The most vigorous sceptic of them all was Count Siegburg, who, to be sure, was the one who knew least of such matters, but who nevertheless spoke of "electrotype casts and modern imitations" with supreme decisiveness.

Wips, or more correctly Wiprecht Siegburg, was the spoilt child of the Austrian circle; I doubt whether he could have invented gunpowder, have discovered America, or have proved that the earth goes round, but for work-a-day company he was certainly pleasanter than Schwarz, Columbus or Galileo. He had been attached to the embassy with no hope of his finding a career, but simply to get him away from Vienna, where his debts

had at last become inconveniently heavy. His widowed mother, after much meditation, had hit upon this admirable plan for checking her son in his extravagance.

"You make me quite nervous, Siegburg," said the princess at length, "though I know that you have not the faintest glimmering of knowledge on the subject."

"Perhaps you are right," he answered coolly. "At any rate, I have lost confidence lately in my critical instincts. I always used to think that the genuineness of antiquities was in proportion to their dirt; but now that I have learnt that even the dirt is counterfeit I have lost all basis of judgment."

They all laughed at this confession, not so much for its wit as because every one laughed at Siegburg's little sallies. They were in the smoking-room, a snug apartment, picturesquely and comfortably furnished with carved wood and oriental cushions. All the party were on the intimate terms of "just ourselves," a mixture of courteous deference and hearty friendliness. The conversation was not precisely learned; on the contrary, there was a certain frivolity in its tone; very bad jokes were perpetrated and some anecdotes related savoring of Saint-Simon in raciness

without any one being scandalized, for they were not in the mood to run every jest to earth, to treat every point by chemical analysis, or take every word literally. Superficiality is sometimes a gracious and a blessed thing.

"I feel so thoroughly at home to-day — in such an Austrian atmosphere. . . ." exclaimed the hostess. "But I have a presentiment that it will not be of long duration. Mesdames de Gandry and Ferguson are dining in this neighborhood. . . ."

As she spoke the servant announced Prince Norina.

"'Coming events cast their shadows before,'" quoted Sempaly; it was well known that when Prince Norina made his appearance the Countess de Gandry would soon follow. Norina was fat and fair, handsome on the barber's block pattern, and for the last four or five years had been dancing attendance on the French countess. He bowed to the princess, shook hands with the men and was instantly seized upon by the master of the house to listen to a tirade on the latest misdemeanors of the government. Vulpini was the blackest of the Black, a strong adherent of the pope, though from political rather than religious bias—chiefly indeed as a fanatically exclusive Roman, who scorned to

make common cause with Italy at large, and regarded "*Italia unita*" as a wild chimera. Prince Norina, who had no political convictions, listened to him and nodded assent to anything and everything.

The company now adjourned to the drawing-room, a large uncomfortable room furnished in a motley style, partly Louis XV. and partly Empire, and which opened out of the more splendid salon in which the princess received formally, and the boudoir to which none but her most intimate friends were admitted. The conversation had lost much of its liveliness, and had flattened to a level at which some of the company had taken refuge in photographs when Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson were announced and rustled in.

Madame de Gandry — a pale brunette, interesting rather than pretty, with a turned-up nose and hard bright eyes, noisy and coquettish, inconsiderate and saucy, because she fancied it gave her style — had for the last five years ruled the destinies of Prince Norina. Society had, however, agreed, perhaps for its own convenience, to regard their intimacy as mere good fellowship. The lady was looked upon as one of those giddy creatures who love to sport on the edge of an abyss. Mrs. Ferguson, the daughter of a hotel-keeper at San

Francisco and wife of a man whose wealth increased daily, was the exact opposite to Madame de Gandry — white and pink, with large eyes and sharp little teeth, very slender and flat-figured like many Americans. She dyed her hair, rouged, dressed conspicuously, spoke eccentric English and detestable French, sang Judic's songs, and had been introduced to Roman society by the Marchese B. . . who had met her at Nice. Her friendship with Madame de Gandry had begun on the strength of a landau they had hired between them, had culminated in an opera-box on the same terms, and would probably be destroyed by a lover — in common too.

A few gentlemen had also arrived: Count de Gandry, who looked like a hair-dresser and was suspected of carrying on a covert business as dealer in antiquities; M. Dieudonné Crespigny de Bellancourt, a square-built French diplomatist, the son of a butcher and son-in-law to a duke, etc., etc. The latest bankruptcy, the climate of Rome, the excavations, were all discussed. Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson submitted at first to the tedium of a general conversation, but contrived at the same time to attract as much of the men's attention as was possible under the circumstances. Soon after eleven the Countess Ilsen-

bergh came in; she had come from a grand dinner and looked bored to death.

"It really is absurd how one meets every one in Rome," she said presently, when she had been questioned as to the how and where of the party she had just quitted. "Who do you think I came across to-day, Marie?—That Lenz girl from Vienna; now she is a duchess or a Countess Montidor—Heaven knows which; once, years ago, I had something to do with a charity sale she got up, so now she comes up to me as if I were an old acquaintance and pretends to be intimate, talks of 'we Austrians,' and 'at home at Vienna.' —Amusing, rather?"

"Poor Fritzi! I feel for you!" exclaimed Sempaly with a malicious laugh. "But there is a greater treat in store for you. The Sterzl women, mother and sister, are coming in a few days."

"Indeed! that is pleasant certainly!"

"Why?" asked Madame de Gandry, throwing herself into the conversation. "Are they objectionable people?"

"By no means," said the countess quickly. "I believe they are the most respectable people in the world, but—it is a bore to be constantly meeting people here whom one could not possibly recog-

nize in Vienna. You should give him a hint, Nicki — tell him — explain to him. . . ."

"To be sure," said Sempaly laughing, "I might say: Look here, my good friend, beware of taking your mother and sister out anywhere; my cousin the countess would rather not meet them."

The countess shrugged her shoulders and turned away from her flippant interlocutor, tapping her fan impatiently. "Do you mean to receive them Marie?" she asked.

"Whom do I not receive?" said the princess in an undertone, with a significant glance.

"Well I cannot — decidedly not," said the countess excitedly, "though I shall be grieved to annoy Sterzl. It will be his own fault entirely if he forces me to explain myself."

"Do as you think proper," replied her friend, "but you know I am very fond of Sterzl; he stands high in my good graces."

"What! *le Paysan du Danube?*" giggled Madame de Gandry, who had only partly understood the conversation.

"Sterzl is a man of the highest respectability," said the countess icily; she did not intend to allow that little French woman to laugh at her fellow-countryman, though he was not a man of birth.

"*Le Paysan du Danube* is my particular friend," said the princess with the simple heartiness that was so peculiarly her own. "I am very fond of him; he is quite one of ourselves."

"He can have no higher reward on earth," said her brother with good-humored irony.

"When my small boy fell and broke his arm, here in this very room, Sterzl picked him up, and you should have seen how gently he held my poor darling," added the princess.

"That is ample evidence in favor of the fact that his woman-kind are presentable," laughed Sempaly.

"But allow me to ask," interposed the Madame de Gandry, "just that I may understand what I am about — these Sterzls, they are not in good society in Austria?"

"Our Austrian etiquette can afford no standpoint for foreign society," said Truyn with unusual sharpness, for he could not endure Madame de Gandry; "we receive no one who is not by birth one of ourselves."

"Yes," said Sempaly with a keen glance, "Austrian society is as exclusive as the House of Israel, and scorns proselytes." And the leather-seller's daughter, who had not understood — or not chosen to understand Truyn's speech, replied

with much presence of mind: "Ah, I am glad to know what I am about."

Siegburg, who was sitting behind her, glanced at Sempaly and made an expressive grimace.

Princess Vulpini looked almost spiteful. "I will not leave Sterzl in the lurch," she said, "and if his sister is like his description of her. . . ."

"He has talked to you about his sister?" interrupted Sempaly.

"To be sure," said the princess with a smile, "and to you too, I should not wonder, Nicki?"

"No indeed, he does not show me his sacred places, I am not worthy," replied Sempaly. "He only told me that she was coming, and with a very singular smile. Hm, Hm! he seems to set great store by the young lady and will no doubt look out for a fine match for her. I should not wonder if he had got her here for that express purpose. Norina, take care of yourself — forewarned you know. . . ."

"Mademoiselle Sterzl will hardly aspire to a prince's crown!" exclaimed Madame de Gandry, up in arms to defend her property.

"Sterzl will not let his sister go for less," asserted Sempaly.

"Do not talk such nonsense," said Truyn, to check Sempaly's audacity.

But Sempaly was leaning over a table and scribbling on the back of an old letter; presently he handed the half sheet to the Countess Ilsenbergh; Madame de Gandry peeped over her shoulder.

"Capital!" she exclaimed, "delicious!" Sempaly had sketched Sterzl as an auctioneer, the hammer in one hand and a fashionably-dressed doll in the other, with all the Princes in Rome crowded round. In one corner he had written: "This lot — Fräulein Sterzl — once, twice, thrice. . . ."

The sketch was handed round; the likeness of Sterzl was unmistakable. Soon after the Countess Ilsenbergh went away, and as the company were not in the best of humors the two friends also withdrew shortly after midnight followed by those gentlemen who had come in their train.

"Fritzi is really a victim to an *idée fixe*," the princess began when this indiscreet group had departed; "she wants me to entrench myself in dignified reserve against this poor little thing. What harm can the child do me?"

"I cannot imagine," said Siegburg; "indeed, if she is pretty and has some money, it strikes me I will marry her myself — that will set matters

straight." Siegburg was fond of talking of the money that his wife must bring him, and liked to air the selfishness of which he was innocent, as very rich folks sometimes make a parade of poverty.

"And it was really very stupid of Fritzi to ventilate this idiotic nonsense before those two women," added the princess, who was apt to express herself strongly; but nothing that she said ever sounded badly, on the contrary, she lent a grace to whatever she said. "Does she think she can make me turn exclusive!"

"I hope you observed how that pinchbeck countess was prepared to tread in her footsteps," said Seigburg.

Truyn meanwhile was hunting eagerly about the chimney-shelf and the tables, assisted by the master of the house.

"What are you looking for, Erich?" asked his sister.

"For that sketch of Sempaly's. I should not like to leave the thing about. Excuse me, Nicki, the caricature was capital, I have nothing to say against it, if it had only been among ourselves; but you really ought not to have shown it to strangers. You are so heedless, you do not think of what you are doing."

"And what have I done now?" asked Sempaly without any trace of annoyance.

"You have simply stamped this young girl as an adventuress on the look-out for a husband."

"Pooh! as if so trifling a jest could be taken in earnest!" said Sempaly. They searched everywhere for the caricature but in vain.

"I am convinced that wretched woman put it in her pocket!" cried the princess indignantly. That wretched woman was of course Madame de Gandry.

It was true that Princess Vulpini was very fond of Sterzl, and he returned her regard with almost rapturous devotion. In spite of an unpolished and absent manner he had a vein of poetic chivalry and a pure reverence for true and lofty womanhood. He could not think it worth his while to offer to any woman that flattery — often impertinent enough in reality — that gratifies some of the sex, and he had never learnt the A B C of modern gallantry; but in his intercourse with those whom he spoke of as "true women" there was a touch of chivalrous protection and reserved deference. His behavior to them was so full of an

old-fashioned courtesy that he was certain to win their favor; he treated them partly like children that must be cared for, and partly like sacred beings before whom we must bow the knee.

Immediately on his arrival in Rome the princess found great pleasure in their acquaintance, she confided to him all her little indignation at this or that grievance in Rome, and allowed him to take a variety of small cares off her shoulders, being, as all women of her soft nature are, very fastidious and utterly unpractical.

There had been few sweeter girls in the Vienna world than the Countess Marie Truyn in her day, and there was not now in all Rome a more lovable woman than the Princess Vulpini. When in the afternoons she drove out in her open carriage, with her four or five children that looked as though they had been stolen straight out of one of Kate Greenaway's picture books, along the Corso to the Villa Borghese, her fashionable acquaintance, who had brought out their most recent or most fashionable bosom-friend instead of their children, would exclaim: "Here comes true happiness!" And the men bowed to her with particular respect, eager to win the friendly and gracious smile that warmed all hearts like a ray of spring sunshine. She had never been a regular

beauty and had early lost her youthful freshness and the slim figure that had been almost proverbial. Nevertheless her charm was undiminished; her chief ornament, a wonderful abundance of bright brown hair, was as fine as ever and she wore it still, as when a girl of sixteen, simply combed back and gathered into a knot low down at the back. In spite of her faded complexion there was a childlike sweetness in her small round face, with its kind little eyes, its delicate turned-up nose, and soft lips that had no beauty till they smiled. All her movements were simple and graceful and her whole appearance conveyed the impression of exquisite refinement and the loftiest womanliness. Her dress was apt to be a little out of fashion, the latest *chic* never suited her. She was a great reader, even of very solid books, especially affecting natural science; but she retained nevertheless the literal faith of her infancy, and this innocent orthodoxy was part and parcel of the simple fervency of her character. Sempaly, who was sincerely attached to her, always spoke of her devout piety as one of her most engaging qualities; he declared that a woman to be truly sympathetic must be religious; that a man may allow himself to profess free thought, but that a sceptical woman was as odious as a woman with a hump. To this

observation, which Sempaly once threw out in the presence of Sterzl, Cecil took great exception, though he himself was as devoid of religious beliefs as Sempaly himself; he thought it impertinent.

"Men do not jest about the women whose names are sacred to them," he said with the pedantic chivalry, which always provoked his colleague's opposition. However, Sempaly only retorted with a sneering smile and a shrug.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days after the evening when Sempaly had given such brilliant proof of his talent as a caricaturist, General von Klinger was sitting in his studio on a divan covered with a picturesque Persian rug and endeavoring — having for the moment nothing better to do — to teach his parrot to sing the Austrian anthem — a loyal task which the bird, perched on the top of its cage, persistently refused to learn. It was a gorgeous studio, with a coved ceiling painted in fresco and a *rococo* plaster cornice, the walls hung with old tapestry, eastern stuffs and other "properties." It was so large that men looked like dwarfs in it, and the general's works of art like illustrations cut out of a picture book. The scirocco brooded in the atmosphere and the general was out of sorts; he could not get on with his painting, and though it was now a quarter to five not a visitor had he seen Usually by this hour he had a number — nay sometimes too many. The general often grumbled — to himself of course — at the interruption; but he always enjoyed the little dissipa-

tion; it made him melancholy to be left to himself.

He was thinking just now how difficult it was to get on as a painter; his coloring was capital—so all his artist friends assured him; but that his drawing left much to be desired he himself confessed. His two strong points were a harmonious effect of grey tone and horses seen from behind. All his pictures returned to him from the exhibitions unsold, excepting one which was purchased by the emperor in consideration of the general's former merits as a soldier rather than of his talents as an artist. The painters who came to smoke his cigarettes accounted for this by saying that his artistic aims were too independent, that he made no concessions to public taste and so could not hope for popularity.

He was in the very act of whistling the national anthem for the sixteenth time to the recalcitrant bird, when he heard a knock at the door; he rose to open it and Sempaly came in. He had called to inform the general that he had discovered a very fine though much damaged piece of tapestry in a convent, and had bought it for a mere song; he had in fact purchased it for the general because he knew that it was just such a specimen as he had long wished for. "But if you do not care to

take it I shall be very glad to keep it," he added. No one had the art of doing an obliging thing with a better grace than he; it was one of his little accomplishments.

When they had settled their business Sempaly broke into loud lamentations that he was obliged to dine that day at the British embassy, and then to dance at the French ambassador's, and raved about the ideal life led by his friend — he only wished he could lead such a life — in which there were no evening parties, routs, balls or dinners. Next he wandered round the room looking at all the studies that hid their faces against the wall. "Charming!" "Superb!" he kept exclaiming in French, with his Austrian accent, from a sheer impulse to say something pleasant — he always tried to make himself pleasant. "Why do not you work that thing up?" he said at length, pointing to a sketch on canvas of a group of bashi-bazouks.

"It might sell," replied the artist whose great difficulty always lay in the 'working up,' "but you know I am independent in my aims, I set my face against making concessions to the vulgar; I must work on my own principles and not to pander to the public."

Sempaly smiled at this profession of faith.

"As it is a mere whim with you ever to sell at all," he answered, "my advice is that you should never attempt it, but leave all your works to the nation, so that we may have a *Musée Wierz* at Vienna."

The general assured him that he was quite in earnest in his desire to sell his pictures, but Sempaly smiled knowingly.

"There was once upon a time," he began, "a cobbler who was a man of genius, but he prided himself on his sense of beauty and his artistic convictions, and he heeded not the requirements of his customers — he would make nothing but Greek sandals. He died a beggar, but happy in the consciousness of never having made a concession to the vulgar."

The general was on the point of making an indignant reply to this malicious anecdote, when the loud rap was again heard which seems to be traditional at a studio door; it is supposed to be necessary to arouse the artist from his absorption in his work. The general went to admit his visitor.

There was a small ante-room between the studio and the stairs. The door was no sooner opened than in flitted a slender creature, fair and blooming, tall, slim, and bewitchingly pretty, in a dark dress and a sealskin jacket.

"What, you Zinka!" cried the old general delightedly. "This is a surprise! How long have you been in Rome?"

"Only since this morning," answered a gay voice.

"And are you alone?" asked the artist in astonishment, as Zinka shut the door and went forward into the atelier.

"Yes, quite alone," she said calmly. "I left the maid at home; she and mamma are fast asleep, resting after their journey. I came alone in a carriage — it was very nice of me do not you think? — Why, what a face to make! . . . And why have you not given me a kiss, Uncle Klinger?" She stood before him bright and confident, her head a little thrown back, her hands in a tiny muff, gazing at him with surprise in her frank grey eyes.

"My dear Zinka. . . ." the general began — for, like all conscientious old gentlemen with romantic memories, he was desperately punctilious as to the proprieties when any lady in whom he took an interest was implicated, "I am charmed, delighted to see you. . . . But in a strange place, where you know no one, and in a strange house where. . . ."

"Oh, now I understand," cried the girl. "It

is not proper! . . . . I shall live to be a hundred before I know exactly what is proper; it is very odd, but Uncle Sterzl used always to say that it was of no use to worry about it; that if people were ladies and gentlemen everything was proper, and if they were not why it was all the same. But he did not know what he was talking about, it would seem!" and she turned sharply on her heel and made for the door.

"But, my dear Zinka," cried the general holding her back, "tell me at least where you are living before you whisk off like a whirlwind. Do not be so utterly unreasonable."

"I am perfectly reasonable," she retorted. She was both embarrassed and angry; her cheeks were scarlet and her eyes full of tears. "It never would have occurred to me certainly that there was anything improper in calling on an old gentleman," and she emphasized the words quite viciously, "in his studio. Oh, the vanity of men! Who can foresee its limits! — But I am perfectly reasonable, I acknowledge my mistake — simpleton that I am! . . . . And I have been looking forward all day to taking you by surprise. I meant to ask you to dine with us at the Hotel de l'Europe and to come with me first to the Pincio to see the sunset. And these are the

thanks I get! . . . . Do not trouble yourself to get your hat, it is waste of trouble; I do not want you now. Good-bye." And she flew off, her head in the air, without looking back once at the general who dutifully escorted her to the carriage.

The old man came back much crest-fallen. A voice greeted him cheerfully:

"Quite in disgrace, general!"

It was Sempaly, who had witnessed the whole scene from a recess, and whom the general had entirely forgotten.

"So it seems," said he shortly, beginning to scrape his palette.

"But tell me who is this despotic little princess?"

"Who? My god-daughter, Zinka Sterzl."

Thunderbolts are out of date, no one believes in them now-a-days; nevertheless it is a fact, which Sempaly himself never contradicted, that he fell in love with Zinka at first sight. And when a few days after Zinka's irruption into the general's studio the old gentleman accepted an invitation to dine with the Baroness Sterzl at the Hotel de l'Europe, on entering the room he found,

eagerly employed in looking over a quantity of photographs with the young lady — Count Sempaly.

The two gentlemen were the only guests, and yet — or perhaps in consequence—the little party was as gay and pleasant as was possible with so affected and formal a hostess as the "Baroness."

This lady, a narrow and perverse soul as ever lived, was the very essence of vanity and affectation. She imagined — Heaven alone knows on what grounds — that the general had formerly loved her hopelessly, and she always treated him accordingly with a consideration that was intolerably irritating. She had made great strides in the airs of refinement since she and the general had last met — at a time before she, or rather her children, had become rich through an advantageous sale of part of their land, and this of course added to the charms of her society. She was perpetually complaining in a tone of feeble elegance — the sleeping-carriages were intolerable, the seats were so badly stuffed, Rome was so dirty, the hotels were so bad, the conveyances so miserable; she brought in the names of all the aristocratic acquaintances they had made at Nice, at Meran, and at Biarritz, and asked — the next day being a saint's day — which church was fit

to go to. The vehement old general answered hotly that "God was in them all." But Sempaly informed her with the politest gravity that Cardinal X. . . . read mass in the morning at St. Peter's and that the music was splendid. "I advise you to try St. Peter's."

"Indeed, is St. Peter's possible on a saint's day?" she asked. "The company is usually so mixed in those large churches."

The general fairly blushed for her follies on her children's account.

"Have you forgiven me, Zinka?" he said to change the conversation.

"As if I had time to trouble myself about your strait-laced proprieties!" exclaimed she, coloring slightly; she evidently did not like this allusion to her little indiscretion: "I have something much worse to think about."

"Why — what is the matter, sweetheart?" asked her brother, who took everything seriously.

"I have lost something," she said in a tone of deep melancholy which evidently covered some jest.

"Not a four-leaved shamrock or a medal blessed by the pope?" asked the general.

"Oh, no! something much more important."

"Your purse!" exclaimed the baroness hastily.

But Zinka burst out laughing. "No, no, something much greater — you will never guess: Rome."

On which Sterzl, who could never make out what his fascinating little sister would be at, only said: "That is beyond me."

But Sempaly was sympathetic. "I see you are terribly disappointed," he said, and Zinka went on like a person accustomed to be listened to.

"Yes, ever since I could think at all I have dreamed of Rome and longed to see it. My Rome was a suburb of Heaven, but this Rome is a suburb of Paris. My Rome was glorious and this Rome is simply hideous."

"Do not be flippant, Zinka," said the general, who always upheld traditional worship.

"Well, as a city Rome is really very ugly," interposed her brother, "it is more interesting as a museum of antiquities with life-size illustrations. Still, you do not know it yet. You have seen nothing as yet. . . ."

"But lodgings, you mean," retorted Zinka, casting down her eyes with sanctimonious sauciness.

"It is dreadful!" the baroness began, "we have been here five days and cannot find an apart-

ment fit to live in. Wherever we go there is some drawback; the stairs are too dark, or the entrance is bad, or there is only one door to the salon, or the servants' rooms. . . ."

"But my dear Zinka," interrupted the general, "if you really have seen nothing of Rome excepting the lodgings in the Corso, of course. . ."

"Oh! but I have seen something else," cried Zinka, "indeed, I know my way about Rome very well."

"In your dreams?"

"No, I went yesterday; mamma had a sick headache."

"Oh! those headaches!" sighed the baroness putting her salts to her nose, "I am a perfect martyr to them!"

To have sick headaches and be a strict Catholic were marks of good style in the baroness's estimation. Sempaly put on a sympathetic expression, but returned at once to the subject in hand.

"Yes, I know Rome very well," Zinka went on: "You have only to ask the driver of the street cab No. 1203, and he will tell you. I drove about with him for three hours yesterday. You see, to have been in Rome a whole week and to have seen nothing but furnished lodgings was really too bad, so I took advantage of the oppor-

tunity when mamma was in bed; I slipped out — you need not make that face, Uncle, I took the maid with me — we meant to walk everywhere with a map. Of course we lost our way, *cela va sans dire*, and as we were standing helpless, each holding the map by a corner, a driver signed to us — so, with his first finger. In we got and he asked us where we wished to go, but as I had no answer ready he said with the most paternal air: 'Ah! the signora wants to see Rome — good, I will show her Rome!' And he set off, round and round and in and out, all through the city. I was positively giddy with this waltz round all the sights of Rome. He showed me a perfect forest of fallen pillars, with images of gods and fragments of sculpture carefully heaped round them, like Christmas boxes for lovers of antiquities — 'the *Campo Vaccino*,' he called it—I believe it was the Forum; then he pointed out the palace of Beatrice Cenci, the Jews' quarter, the Theatre of Marcellus, the Temple of Vesta; and every time he showed me anything he added: 'Now am I not a capital guide? Many a driver would only take you from place to place, and what would you see? Nothing .... a heap of stones.... but I tell you: that is the Colisseum, and this is the Portico of Octavia, and then the stones have some meaning.' And at

last he set me down at the door of the hotel and said quite seriously: 'Now the signora has seen Rome.'"

They were now at dessert; the baroness looked anything rather than pleased.

"Allow me to request," she said, "that for the future in the first place you will not make friends with a common driver and in the second, that you will not drive about Rome in a *Botta* (a one horse carriage); it is not at all the thing. You have no sense of fitness whatever."

Zinka, who was both sensitive and spoilt, colored.

"Let her be, mother, why should she not learn a little Italian and ride in a *Botta?*" said Sterzl, who rubbed his mother the wrong way from morning till night. Sempaly took prompt advantage of the situation to whisper to Zinka:

"I cannot promise to be as good company as your *Botta* driver, but if you will allow me, I will do my best to help you to find the Rome you have lost."

"Are you sure you know your way about?" asked the girl with frank incivility.

"I am the *laquais de place* of the Embassy I assure you," replied Sempaly laughing; "my only

serious occupation consists in showing strangers the sights of Rome."

After this the evening passed gaily; the baroness made a few idiotic speeches but Sempaly forbore to be ironical; he was on his very best behavior, and the baroness was quite taken in by his elaborate reserve. Not so Sterzl, who was himself too painfully alive to her aristocratic airs and pretensions. However, the society of his sister, whom he adored, had put him into the best of humors; he launched forth a few bitter epigrams against the priesthood, and was satirical about the society of Rome, but Zinka stopped him every time with some engaging nonsense, and in listening to her chatter he forgot his bitterness.

At last he asked her to sing a Moravian popular song; she seated herself at the hotel piano and began. There was something mystical in the low veiled tones of her voice like an echo of the past, as she sang the melancholy, dreamy strains of her native land. Sterzl, who always yawned all through an opera, listened to her singing, his head resting on his hand, in a sort of ecstasy. In Sempaly too, who in spite of his Hungarian name was by birth a Moravian, Zinka's simple melody roused the half-choked echoes of his youth, and

when she ceased he thanked her with genuine feeling.

Zinka's was an April weather nature. After bringing the tears into the eyes of her hearers, nay into her own, with her song, she suddenly struck up an air by Lecocq that she had heard Judic sing at Nice. The words, as was perfectly evident to all the party, were Hebrew to the girl, but the baroness was beside herself.

"Zinka!" she exclaimed in extreme consternation, "you really are incredible—what must these gentlemen think of you!"

"Do not be in the least uneasy," said the general. But Zinka stopped short; her face was pale and quivering; Sterzl interposed:

"It is often a little difficult to follow my sister's vagaries," he said turning to Sempaly; then he tenderly stroked her golden head with his large, firm hand, saying: "Do not be unhappy, sweetheart; but you are a little too much of a goose for your age."

When presently Sempaly had quitted the hotel with the general his first words were: "Tell me, how is it that with such a fool of a mother that child has remained so angelically fresh — so *Botticelli?*"

CHAPTER V.

A MINE somewhere in Poland or Bohemia came to grief about this time by some accidental visitation, and five hundred families were left destitute through the disaster. Of course the opportunity was immediately seized upon for charitable dissipations, for qualifying for Orders of Merit by liberal donations, and for attracting the eyes of Europe by the most extravagant display of philanthropy. After much deliberation Countess Ilsenbergh had arrived at the conviction that, as both the ambassadors' families were hindered by mourning from giving any public entertainment, the duty of taking the lead devolved upon her. The rooms in her Palazzo were made on purpose for grand festivities, and after endless discussion it was decided that the entertainment should be dramatic. An Operetta, a *Proverbe* by Musset, and a series of *Tableaux Vivants* were finally put in rehearsal and a collection was to be made after the performance.

Madame de Gandry threw herself into the undertaking with the most commendable ardor.

She was on intimate terms with the leading spirits at the Villa Medici — the French Academy of Arts at Rome — and she interested herself in the painting of the scenes, and in the artistic designing of the dresses in which she proved invaluable. Up to a certain point all went smoothly. The operetta — an unpublished effort of course — by a Russian amateur of rank who was very proud of not even knowing his notes, was soon cast. It needed only three performers and led up to the introduction of an elaborate masquerade and of certain suggestive French songs. Mrs. Ferguson, who never let slip an opportunity of powdering her hair and sticking on patches, was to sing the soprano part; Crespigny took that of a husband or a guardian in a nightcap or flowered dressing-gown, and a young French painter, M. Barillat, who was at all times equally ready to sketch or to wear a becoming costume, was to fill that of the lover. The cast of the little French play was equally satisfactory; but when the arrangement of the tableaux came to be considered difficulties arose. In the first place all the ladies were eager to display their charms under the becoming light of a tableau vivant; and the number of volunteers was quite bewildering to the committee of management that met every day at the Ilsenberghs'

house. Then squabbles and dissatisfaction arose; the ladies did not approve of the choice of subjects, they thought their dresses unbecoming, their positions disadvantageous; each one to whom a place at the side was assigned was deeply aggrieved; an unappreciated beauty who prided herself on her profile from the left would not for worlds be seen from the right, etc., etc. And above all — an insuperable difficulty — almost all the available men of the set manifested the greatest objection to 'making themselves ridiculous' and positively rejected the most flattering blandishments of the ladies' committee. Sempaly, who had been asked to appear as a Roman emperor, would not hear of putting on flesh-colored tights and a wreath of vine; and Truyn had shrugged his shoulders at the proposal that he should don a wig with long curls.

Siegburg — little Siegburg, as he was always called, though he was nearly six feet high — after defending himself with considerable humor, good-naturedly agreed to stand as *Pierrot*, in a Watteau scene in which the Vulpini children were to appear; and Sterzl, being personally requested by his ambassador, submitted, though with an ill grace, to be the executioner in Delaroche's picture of Lady Jane Grey. This tableau was to be the crowning

glory of the performance; Barillat had taken infinitely more pains with it than with any other; the part of Lady Jane was to be filled by a fair English girl, Lady Henrietta Stair; and then, within a few days of the performance, Lady Henrietta fell ill of the measles.

The committee were in despair when this news reached them, and all who were concerned in the performance were summoned to meet at the Palazzo that evening to talk the matter over. Hardly any one was absent; only Sterzl, who detested the whole charity scramble, as he called it, sent his excuses. Every lady present expected to find herself called upon to stand — or rather to kneel — as Lady Jane Grey; but Mrs. Ferguson was the first to give utterance to the thought, and to offer herself heroically as Lady Henrietta's substitute. To the astonishment of all the company Sempaly, whose interest in the work of benevolence had hitherto displayed itself only in satirical remarks, and suggestions as to the representation of Makart's 'entrance of Charles V.' or of Siemiradzky's 'living torches,' took an eager part in the discussion.

"Your self-sacrifice, Mrs. Ferguson," said he, "is more admirable every day."

"Dear me," replied the lady innocently,

"where is the self-sacrifice in having an old gown cut up into a historical costume?"

"That, indeed, would be no sacrifice," said Sempaly coolly. "But it must be a sacrifice for a lady to appear in a part that suits her so remarkably ill."

Mrs. Ferguson smiled rather like some pretty little wild beast showing its teeth.

"Ah!" she said, "I suppose you think I have none of that pathetic grace that M. Barillat is so fond of talking about."

"No more than of saving grace," said Sempaly solemnly. Then, while the women were disputing over the matter, he found an opportunity of whispering a few words to Barillat; Barillat looked up delighted. At this moment they were joined by Countess Ilsenbergh.

"I have another suggestion to offer Madame la Comtesse; I have thought of some one. . ."

"Some newly-imported American," laughed Madame de Gandry, "or a painter's model with studied grace and yellow hair?"

"You may rest assured that I should not for an instant think of proposing to employ a model," Barillat emphatically declared; "no, the lady in question is a very charming person: Fräulein Sterzl. I saw her the day before yesterday at

Lady Julia Ellis's; she is an Austrian — you must know her surely?"

"I have not that pleasure," said the countess drily.

"You do not think she will do?" murmured the artist abashed. The countess cleared her throat.

"Bless me!" cried Madame de Gandry furious at the pride of her Austrian friend, "you take the matter really too much in earnest. Why on earth should not the girl act with us? On these occasions, in Vienna, as I have been informed, even actors are invited to help."

"That is quite different," said the countess.

Madame de Gandry shrugged her shoulders and turned away and the countess beckoned to her cousin Sempaly. "I am heartily sick of the whole business," she exclaimed. "At home I have got this sort of thing up a score of times, and everything has gone well . . . while here. . ."

"Yes, there is more method among us" replied Sempaly sympathetically.

"The people here are so unmanageable; every one wants to play the best parts," said the countess.

"That is the result of the republican element," observed Sempaly.

"And now there is all this difficulty about the Lady Jane Grey tableau," sighed the countess. "Why need that English girl take the measles now, just when she is wanted."

"The English are always so inconsiderate," said Sempaly gravely.

"Do you happen to have met this little Sterzl girl?"

"Yes."

"What does she look like?"

"Well, she looks like a very pretty girl. . ."

"And besides that?"

"Besides that she looks very much like our own girls; it is really a most extraordinary freak of nature! She seems to be very presentable on further acquaintance; Princess Vulpini is quite in love with her."

"Indeed! — Well, Barillat is possessed with the idea of having her to play the part of Lady Jane Grey and in Heaven's name let him have his own way!" cried the countess. "If Marie Vulpini will bring her here I will make the best of it."

"What, you mean to say that you will let her figure in your tableau and not invite her mother?" laughed Sempaly.

"Invite her! — to the performance of course.

I invite Tom, Dick, and Harry, and all the English parsons and all the foreign artists."

"And all their families. Fritzi, you are an admirable woman!" retorted Sempaly ironically.

"But the rehearsals are so perfectly intimate.." she murmured. Time pressed however. "Well, have it so for all I care;" said the countess resignedly and next morning she paid a polite call on the Baroness Sterzl to request Zinka's assistance; and as she had as much tact as pride she had soon reconciled not only Zinka, but her sensitive thin-skinned brother, to the fact that the young girl had only been asked at the last moment and under the pressure of necessity to take part in the performance. Cecil did not altogether like the idea of displaying his pretty sister in a tableau and only consented because he did not like to deprive Zinka of the pleasure which she looked forward to with great delight. He adored the child and could refuse her nothing.

The evening of the festival arrived; the performances took place in a vast room almost lined with mirrors and lighted by wonderful Venetian chandeliers that hung from the decorated ceiling where frescoes were framed in tasteless gilt scroll work. In spite of its size the room was crowded; the most illustrious of the company sat in solitary

dignity in the front row, and behind them was packed a fashionable but somewhat mixed crowd. Manly forms of consummate elegance were squeezed against the walls, and the assembly sparkled like a sea of sheeny silks and glittering jewels. Princess Vulpini, who was helping the countess to do the honors, hovered on the margin, graceful and kindly, but a little pale and tired, and the countess herself reigned supreme in that regal dignity which she could so becomingly assume on fitting occasions. There were very few women who could wear a diamond coronet with such good grace as Fritzi Ilsenbergh — even her intractable cousin Sempaly did her that much justice.

The great success of the evening was not the little French play, in which Madame de Gandry and the all-accomplished Barillat made and parried their hits after the accepted methods of the *Théatre Français;* it was not the operetta, in which Mrs. Ferguson looked bewitchingly pretty and sang *'le Sentier couvert'* to admiration; it was not even the children's tableau, in which the little Vulpinis looked like a bunch of freshly-gathered roses; the great success of the evening was the tableau of Lady Jane Grey. Sterzl's face in this scene was a perfect tragedy, all the misery of an executioner who adores his victim

was legible there. And Zinka! — gazing up to heaven with ecstatic pathos, her whole attitude expressive of sacred resignation and childlike awe, she was the very embodiment of the hapless and innocent being before whom the executioner lowers his gaze. A string quartet played the *allegretto* from Beethoven's seventh symphony and the melancholy music heightened the effect of the poetical tableau, thrilling the audience like a lullaby sung by angels to soothe the struggling, suffering human soul.

The whole artistic corps who had been invited from the Villa Medici, with the director at their head, unanimously decided that this performance far excelled all that had gone before, and Countess Ilsenbergh forgot in its success all the annoyance it had occasioned her. After the collection, which produced a magnificent sum, most of the company dispersed. Ilsenbergh, with his most feudal smile, expressed his thanks to all the performers in turn and presented elegant bouquets to the ladies. The entertainment lost its formal character and became a social gathering.

Zinka was sitting in a side room, surrounded by a host of young Romans and Frenchmen. As she was one of those rare natures who derive not the smallest satisfaction from the homage of men

for whom they have no regard, she listened to their enthusiastic compliments with absolute indifference.

She had asked for an ice and Norina had offered it to her on his knees, remaining in that position to pour out a string of high-flown compliments. Zinka, unaccustomed to this Southern effusiveness, was remonstrating with some annoyance but without the slightest effect, when Sempaly came in and exclaimed in the abrupt tone he commonly used to younger men: "Get up, Norina, do you not see that your devotion is not appreciated."

The prince rose with a scowl, Sempaly drew a seat to Zinka's side and in five minutes had, as usual, entirely monopolized her.

"My cousin the countess owes everything to you," he said in his most musical tones; "you saved the whole thing. I detest all amateur performances, but that tableau of Lady Jane Grey was really beautiful."

"I liked the French play very much. Madame de Gandry's acting was full of spirit."

"Bah! I have had more than enough of such spirit."

"Indeed!" laughed she, "it seems to me that you are suffering from general weariness of life. You are blasé."

"What do you understand by being blasé?" he asked.

"Why, that exhaustion of heart and soul which comes of the fatigue produced by a life of perpetual enjoyment; it is I believe an essential element in the character of a man of fashion."

"Something between a malady and an affectation," remarked Sempaly.

"Just so; in short, to be blasé is the heart-sickness of a fop."

Sempaly glanced at her keenly. "Your definition is admirable," he said, "I will make a note of it; but the cap does not fit me. I am not blasé, I am not indifferent to anything. Shams, hypocrisy, and meretriciousness irritate me, but when I meet with anything really good or lovely or genuine I can recognize it and admire it — more perhaps than most men."

Meanwhile the winner of the musical prize from the Villa Medici had sat down to the piano and plunged straightway out of a maundering improvisation into a waltz by Strauss. The countess had no objection if they liked to dance, and several couples were soon spinning under the flaring candles.

Sempaly rose: "May I have the honor?" he

said to Zinka, and they went together into the dancing-room.

Zinka had the pretty peculiarity of turning pale rather than red as she danced; her movements were not sprightly, but gliding and dreamy; in fact she waltzed with uncommon grace. Sempaly had long since lost the subaltern's delight in a dance; he only asked ladies who had some special interest or charm for him, and every one knew it.

"Hm!" said Siegburg, shaking his head as he went up to General von Klinger who was watching the graceful couple from a recess, "my little game has come to nothing it seems to me."

"Have you retired then?" asked the general.

"By no means — quite the contrary; but my chances are small enough at present I fancy; what do you say?" He looked straight into the old man's eyes; he understood and said nothing.

"She dances beautifully, I never saw a girl dance better. How well she holds her head," he murmured. Suddenly a flash of amusement lighted up his eyes. "Look at Fritzi's face!" he exclaimed: "What a horrified expression! a perfect Niobe."

CHAPTER VI.

SEMPALY'S intimacy with the Sterzls grew daily; he did the honors of Rome to Zinka, and dined with them as a fourth two or three times a week. After the tableaux at the Ilsenberghs' Zinka was asked everywhere; all the men were at her feet, and all the ladies wanted to learn her songs. The men she treated with the utmost indifference and to the ladies she was always obliging, particularly to those whom no one else would take the pains to be civil to, all of which greatly added to her popularity. Truyn's little girl — a spoilt, shy thing, who quarrelled with her maid three times a week regularly and insisted on learning everything from Latin to water-color drawing, though she would submit to no teacher but her father, perfectly worshipped Zinka and to her was as docile as a lamb. Princess Vulpini was delighted at her influence on her little niece and declared that Zinka was a real treasure; and Lady Julia Ellis, who had made the young girl's acquaintance two years since at Meran, was proud to take her out. Whenever the baroness could not go the

English lady was always ready to chaperon Zinka, and when Lady Julia was 'at home' Zinka had to help her to receive her guests and to make tea.

Countess Schalingen, a Canoness devoted to painting, full of sentimentality and romance, whose ideas had not yet got beyond Winterhalter, called Zinka 'quite delicious,' took her on excursions, dragged her to all the curiosity-dealers, and finally painted her portrait on a handscreen for Princess Vulpini—her head and shoulders in gauzy drapery coming out of a lily. Before the end of a fortnight a rich American had enquired about her rank and extraction, and the handsome Crespigny had learnt all about her fortune. Norina paid his court to her when his tyrant's back was turned and Mrs. Ferguson did her the honor of being madly jealous.

But all this did not turn her head, it did not seem even to astonish her; she had always been spoilt and wherever she had gone she had found friends and admirers. When people were kind to her she was delighted, but she would have been much more astonished if they had not been kind. Sempaly had called her "*a Botticelli*," but the word was only applicable to her mind; in appearance she had none of the ascetic grace of the pre-Raphaelites. She was more like the crayon

figures of Latour, or that typical beauty of the eighteenth century, la Lamballe. She had not the bloom of pink and white, but was pale, even in her youthful freshness with soft shadows under her eyes; and her hair, which was thick and waved naturally had reddish lights in the brown. A tender down softened its outline on her temples without shading her forehead, and gave her face a look of peculiar innocence. She was slight but not angular, her arms were long and thin, her hands small and sometimes red. Her moods varied between dreamy thoughtfulness and saucy high spirits, her gait was usually free and light but occasionally a little awkward, "like an angel with its wings clipped," Sempaly said. She had a low veiled voice in speaking that reminded one of the vibrating tones of an Amati violin. She was as wild as a boy, as graceful as a water nixie, and as innocent as a child—with the crude innocence of a girl who has been brought up chiefly by men — and all her ideas had the stamp of dreamy seclusion and fervid sentiment.

She had had French and English governesses and had even been to school in a convent for a year; still, the ruling influence in her life had been that of her guardian, General Sterzl — an eccentric being with an intense horror of sentimental

school-friendships and of the conventional propriety that comes of too early familiarity with the world. It was to him that Zinka owed the one good word which Countess Ilsenbergh spoke in her favor:

"One thing must be admitted; she is not affected, she is as natural as one of our own girls."

"Poor Coralie!" the baroness would frequently exclaim, "what a pity that she is not here; what a treat it would be for her!"

"Yes," Sterzl would answer in his dry way, "she was in too great a hurry." And the baroness would cast her eyes up to heaven.

Coralie was her eldest and favorite daughter. Disappointed in her love of some hard-hearted gentleman she had renounced the vanities of the world some three years since, but — like her mother's worthy daughter — even in the depth of her disappointment and despair she had taken care to choose a convent where the recluses were divided into ladies and sisters, where the children who came to school there played hide and seek under a French name, and where being a boarder was called being *en pension*.

"Poor Coralie!" the baroness would sigh; and then seating herself at her writing-table she would scribble endless letters about the delights of a residence at Rome to all her friends in Austria, and especially to her sister, the Baroness Wolnitzka.

Baroness Sterzl was a typical specimen of a class of nobility peculiar to Austria, and called there, Heaven knows why, "the onion nobility" (zwiebelnoblesse). It is a circle that may be described as a branch concern of the best society; a half-blood relation; a mixture of the elements that have been sifted out of the upper aristocracy and of the parvenus from below, who find that they can be reciprocally useful; a circle in which almost every man is a baron, and every woman, without exception, is a baroness. Its members are for the most part poor, but refined beyond expression. The mothers scold their children in bad French and talk to their friends in fashionable slang; they give parties, at which there is nothing to eat — but the family plate is displayed, and where the company always consists of the same old bachelors who dye their hair and know the *Almanach de Gotha* by heart. Everyone is well informed about the doings of the world — how many shifts Minnie N. had in her trousseau, why

the engagement between Fritz O. and Lori P. was broken off, and much more to the same effect. Of late years the 'onion-nobility,' with various other offshoots of the higher culture, has been swamped by the advance of the liberals, that is to say, by the progress of the financial classes.

Only a year since the baroness herself had stood on the stairs of the opera-house to watch the occupants of the grand tier — at that time appropriated to the cream of the aristocracy — to take note of aristocratic dresses, and to hear aristocratic nothings from aristocratic lips. Now, in Rome, she was living in the whirl of society. Her satisfaction knew no bounds, and she made daily progress in exclusiveness; the Countess Ilsenbergh, as compared to her, was a mere bungler. But she was never so amusing to watch as when she met some fellow-countrymen of untitled rank. It happened that this winter there was in Rome a certain Herr Brauer, an old simpleton with a very handsome wife who laid herself open for the admiration of all the young men of any pretensions. Being furnished with a few letters of introduction he and his fascinating partner disported themselves very contentedly in the outer circle—the suburbs, so to speak — of good society without having a suspicion how far they were from the centre.

Baroness Sterzl could never cease wondering "how those people could be tolerated."

She was always well dressed, she gave capital little dinners, she had the neatest coupé and the most comfortable landau, and her coachman had the cleanest shaved imperial face and the smartest livery in Rome. Her manners were somewhat changeable, since she was constantly endeavoring to appropriate the airs and graces of the most fashionable women she met. She was extremely unpopular and consequently bored to death wherever she went; she was never quite easy as to her footing in society and lived in the discomfort of a person who is always trying to walk on tiptoe.

Her sole unqualified pleasure during this period — which, however, she always spoke of as the happiest of her life — was the writing of the above-mentioned letters home, and especially as has been said, to her sister the Baroness Wolnitzka in Bohemia.

She craved a public to witness her success and, like all mean natures, she knew no greater joy than that of exciting envy; she would often read these epistles to Zinka, for she was very proud of her wordy style. Zinka was somewhat disturbed by these flowery compositions which always ended with these words: "What a pity it is that you

should not be here. It would give us the greatest pleasure to have you with us."

"Take care, mamma," said the girl, "they will take you at your word and descend upon us."

"What are you dreaming of?" said the baroness folding her letter with the utmost philosophy; "they have no money."

CHAPTER VII.

HOVELS deep sunk in the ground, moss-grown thatched roofs, here and there an old lime-tree or a tall pear-tree with crabbed branches standing out black and bare against the wintry sky, slimy puddles, a pond full to the brim in which three forlorn-looking geese are sadly paddling, a swampy road along which a procession of ploughs are splashing their way at the heels of the muddy, unkempt teams — in short, a Bohemian village, with a shabby manor-house beyond. Over the tumble-down gate-way, with a pigsty on one side and a dog-kennel on the other, hangs a coat of arms. The mansion — a square house with a steep shingle roof — stands, according to the unromantic custom of the country, with one side looking on to the farm-yard; and the drawing-room windows open exactly over an enormous dung heap which a party of women are in the very act of turning with pitch-forks, under the superintendence of a short stout man in a weather-beaten hunting-hat and shooting-coat with padded silk sleeves out of which the wadding is peeping at a

hundred holes. He is smoking a pipe with a china bowl decorated with a mincing odalisque. His face is broad and red, his ears purple, and his aspect is anything rather than aristocratic as he stands giggling and jesting with the damsels of the steaming midden.

This is Baron Wolnitzky, a man who, like a good many others, got himself a good deal talked about in 1848 and then vanished from the scene without leaving a trace behind.

Often when we see some dry and barren tree shedding its sere and mouldy leaves in the autumn we find it hard to believe that it bore blossoms in the spring; and the baron was like such a tree. In the spring-tide of 1848 — an over-teeming spring throughout Europe — his soul too had blossomed. He had had patriotic visions and had uttered them in rhyme, and his country had hailed him as a prophet — perhaps because it needed an idol, or perhaps because in those agitated times it could not tell black from white. In those days he had displayed himself in a magnificent national costume with sleeves of the most elaborate cut, had married a patriotic wife who always dressed in the Slav colors: blue, white, and red, and who got two young men, also dressed in Slav costume, to mount guard at the door of her house. He was

descended from a Polish family that had immigrated many generations since and his connections were as far as possible from being aristocratic, while he owed his little fortune entirely to his father who had put no 'baron' before his name, and who had earned it honestly as a master baker. In feudal times it would hardly have occurred to him to furbish up this very doubtful patent of nobility; but in the era of liberty it might pass muster and prove useful. A very shy pedigree serves to shed glory on a democratic martyr.

During the insurrection of June he fled with his wife in picturesque disguise; at first to Dresden, and then to Switzerland where he lived for some time in a boarding-house at Geneva, receiving homage as a political refugee, and horrifying the mistress by his enormous appetite. At length he returned to Bohemia where the events of forty-eight and its picturesquely aparelled leaders had fallen into oblivion. He retired to his little estate and turned philosopher — philosophy, ever since the days of Diogenes, has been the acknowledged refuge of shipwrecked hopes and pretensions.

There he went out walking in his shirt sleeves, played cards with the peasants and grew more vulgar, fatter, and hungrier every day; and if he ever had an idea it was unintentionally, in a bad

dream after eating too much of some national delicacy.

His wife, a robust and worthy soul, though full of absurdities, bore a strong resemblance to the mother of the Regent Orleans in as much as she had a sound understanding combined with a very sentimental nature, was utterly devoid of tact, bitter to the verge of cynicism, thoroughly indiscreet and a great chatterbox.

She resigned herself without demur to the new order of things and brought a new tribe of children into the world, most of whom died young. Three survived; two sons, who so far broke through the traditions of the family as to become infantry officers, and one daughter, in whom patriotic romance once more flickered into fanaticism. This girl had been christened Bohuslawa, a name which was commonly shortened into Slawa, which in the more important dialects of the Slav tongue means Fame. She, like her mother, was of stalwart build, but her features were regular though statuesque and heavy—she was said to be like the Apollo Belvedere. She had already had four suitors but neither of them had met her views and now at twenty—having been born in forty-eight—she was spending the winter, unmarried and sorely discontented, in the country, where she

occupied herself with serious studies and accepted the attentions of a needy young Pole who was devoted to her and in whom she condescended to take some slight interest.

But Baron Wolnitzky is still standing by the midden; the great black dog, which till this moment has never ceased barking at the door of his kennel, now, to introduce some variety into the programme, jumps on to its roof, from which advantageous standpoint he still barks without pause. Everything is dripping from the recently-thawed snow, and the air is full of the splash and gurgle of dropping and trickling water; the grey February twilight sinks upon the world and everything looks dingy and soaked.

A sound of creaking wheels is heard approaching, and a dung-cart appears in the gate-way.

"Well, what is going on in the town?" says the baron to the man who comes up to him, wrapped in an evil-smelling sheepskin and with the ears of his fur cap tied under his chin, to kiss his master's elbow. "Have you brought the newspapers?"

"Yes, your Grace, my Lord Baron," says the man, "and a letter too." And he draws a packet tied up in a red and white handkerchief out of a pocket in his sheepskin. The baron looks at the

documents. "Another letter from Rome already," he mutters, grinning; "I must take it in at once that the women may have something to talk about."

The women, that is to say his wife and daughter, were sitting in the dining-room at a long table covered with a flowered cloth, on which stood the tea things, a paraffine lamp, and a bread-basket of dull silver filagree work. The lamp was smoking and the table looked as uncomfortable and dingy as the village outside, half-buried in manure. The baroness, in a tan-colored loose gown, in which she looked squarer than ever, without a cap, her thin grey hair cut short, was hunting for the tenth time to-day, on and under every article of furniture, for the key of the store-room. Bohuslawa, meanwhile sat still, with a volume of Mickiewicz in her hand, out of which she was reading aloud in rather stumbling Polish, with a harsh voice. A young man with a sharp-cut sallow face and long black hair, in a Polish braided coat, wide collar and olive-coloured satin cravat, corrected her pronunciation now and then. He was her Polish adorer. He was one of that familiar species, the teacher of languages with a romance in the background; he lived in the neighouring town and came every Saturday to the

village, four railway stations off, to instruct Bohuslawa in Polish and spend Sunday with the family.

When the union of these two patriots—which had already been secretly discussed—was to take place, depended on a mysterious law-suit that the young Pole was carrying on against the Russian government. His name was Vladimir de Matuschowsky, his grandmother had been a Potocka, and when he was not giving lessons, he was meditating conspiracies.

"Is there nothing else for tea?" asked the baron, casting a doubtful eye on the stale-looking rolls in the bread-basket.

"No, the dogs have eaten up the cakes," replied the baroness coolly. She was at the moment on all-fours under the piano, hunting for the key behind the pedal.

"You will get an apoplexy," said Bohuslawa crossly but without anxiety, and without making the smallest attempt to assist the old lady. But at this instant a housemaid came in with the sought-for key on a bent and copper-colored britannia-metal waiter.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" cried the baroness, "where was the wretched thing?"

"In the dog kennel,—your grace, my lady baroness, the puppy had dragged it there."

In her love for dogs again the baroness resembled the Duchess of Orleans; she always had a litter of half a dozen puppies to bring up, and the kennel was a well-known hiding place for everything that could not be found in its right place.

"The little rascals!" she exclaimed, with an admiring laugh at the ingenious perversity of her mischievous pets. "Bring the sugar then, Clara."

"I have a surprise for you," growled her husband, "a letter from Rome," and he produced the document, with its mixed odors of patchouli and damp sheepskin, and pushed it across to his wife, while he took up the rum bottle to flavor his tea.

"From Rome!" exclaimed the baroness, "that is delightful. Where, oh where are my spectacles?" And she felt and patted herself all over till the superfluous substance shook like a jelly.

"Ah, here they are — I am sitting on them— now then, children," and she began to read the letter aloud.

"Dear Lotti, you must not take it ill that I so seldom write to you" — the baroness looked up over her spectacles—"so seldom! . . . she never in her life wrote to me so often as from Rome" — "but you cannot imagine the turmoil in which we live. A dinner-party every day, two evening

parties and a ball. We are spending the carnival with the *crême de la crême* of Roman society. To-morrow we dine with Princess Vulpini — she was a Truyn and is the sister of Truyn of R. The next day we have theatricals, etc., etc. Zinka is an immense success. Nicki Sempaly among others —the brother of Prince Sempaly, the great landed proprietor — is very attentive to her. . . ."

Here she was interrupted by her husband. "Well, I never thought the old goose was quite such a simpleton!" he exclaimed, drumming his fingers angrily on the red and white flowered cloth.

"I cannot imagine how Clotilde allows it!" cried the baroness — "and still less do I understand Cecil."

"Take my advice, Lotti, go to Rome," observed the baron ironically; "go and set their heads straight on their shoulders."

"With the greatest pleasure," replied his wife, taking his irony quite seriously, "but unfortunately we have not the money."

Then she read the letter to the end; like all Clotilde's epistles it ended with the words: "What a pity it is that you should not be here too; it would give us the greatest pleasure to have you with us."

Tea was done; the maid servant cleared the table with a great clatter of cups and spoons, the baron retired to play *Bulka* with his neighbors in the village inn-parlor; the three who were left sat in meditative mood.

"I must confess that I should like to go to Rome," said the baroness, as she swept the crumbs off her lap on to the floor, "and it would be pleasant, too, to have relations there — for their grand acquaintance I own I do not care a straw."

"I do not see why we should avoid all society if we were there," exclaimed Slawa hotly.

"Well, you could do as you liked about it, of course," said the baroness, who held her daughter in the deepest respect, "I could stay at home; you see, my dear Vladimir," she added almost condescendingly to her son-in-law *in spe*, "I am uncomfortable in any company where I cannot get into my slippers in the evening. . ."

"Mamma!" cried her daughter beside herself, "you really are! . . ."

The baroness sat abashed and silent — no one spoke. There was not a sound in the room but the crackling of the fire in the huge tiled stove and the snoring of the big hunting-dog that lay sleeping on the tail of his mistress's skirt.

"If we only could sell the Bernini!" murmured

the baroness presently, resuming the thread of their conversation.

The Bernini was a bust of Apollo that the baroness had inherited from her mother's family—said to be an adaptation by Bernini from the head of the Apollo Belvedere. Whenever the Wolnitzkys were in any financial straits the Bernini was packed off to some dealer in objects of *vertu*, from which excursions it invariably returned unsold. Not many days previously the travelled Apollo—he had seen New York, London, and St. Petersburg — had come home from a visit to Meyer of Berlin.

"By the bye, Vladimir, you have not seen it yet," said Slawa, "I must show you the bust."

"Is it the head that is said to be so strikingly like you?—that will interest me greatly," said the young Pole, casting an adoring eye on Slawa.

"Bring the lamp, the bust is in the drawing-room."

Vladimir, carrying the lamp, led the way into the drawing-room, a large, scantily-furnished room which was never dusted more than once a month. There, on a marble plinth in a corner, stood the radiant god — a copy from the Belvedere Apollo no doubt — but by Bernini. . . ?

"The likeness is extraordinary!" cried Vladimir ecstatically, and gazing alternately at the bust and at Slawa. "Oh, it is a gem, a masterpiece! you ought never to part with it."

"Well, but I must say I should very much like to go to Rome," sighed the baroness; but Slawa only bit her lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AND what shall we do to-morrow?" Sempaly would ask Zinka almost every evening when he met her, fresh and smiling, at some party; he had made it his task to help her to find her lost Rome and devoted himself to it with praiseworthy diligence.

The disappointment that she had experienced in her expedition under the guidance of the *botta* driver to the ruins of the capital of the Caesars is a common enough phenomenon; it comes over almost everyone who sets out with his fancy crammed with the mystical cobwebs that recent literature has spun round the name of Rome, to see for the first time that dense mass of splendor and rubbish among the bare modern houses. And the disappointment is greatest in those who come from a long stay in Venice or Verona. Rome has none of the seductive charm of those North Italian cities. Its architecture is sombre and heavy, and the prevailing hues in winter are a sober grey and a dull bluish-green, more suggestive of a subtly toned tempera picture than of a

glowing oil painting. It is vain to look for the sheen of the shimmering lagoons or the fantastic outline of the campaniles against the sky of Venice; for the half-ruined frescoes, or amber sunshine of Verona.

"After the cities of North Italy Rome has the effect of a severe choral by Handel after a nocturne by Chopin. The first impression is crushing," said Sempaly to Zinka; "but one wearies of the nocturne, and never of the choral."

To which Zinka replied: "But the choral is so drowned by trivial hurdy-gurdy tunes that I find it very difficult to follow." To which he laughed and said: "We will speak of that again in a fortnight."

By the end of the fortnight Zinka had thrown two *soldi* into the Fountain of Trevi to make sure that she should some day see Rome again, and in fanaticism for Rome she outdid even the fanatical General von Klinger. Sempaly had contributed mainly to her conversion. Nothing could be more amusing or more interesting than to explore every nook of the city of ruins under his escort. He was constantly remembering this or that wonderful thing that he must positively show to Zinka. An artistic bas-relief that had been built to some queer orange-colored house above a

tobacconist's, or a heathen divinity which had had wings attached to its shoulders to qualify it for admission as an angel into a Christian church. He rode out with her into the Campagna, and pointed out all the most picturesque parts of the Trastevere, and he could find a ridiculous suggestion even in the most reverend things. The halls of the Vatican in which the liberal minded Vicars of Christ have granted a refuge to the pensioners of antiquity, he called the Poor-house of the gods; and always spoke of St. Peter's, which is commonly known as *la Parocchia dei Forestieri*, as the Papal Grand Hotel. There was not a fountain, a fragment of sculpture, or a picturesque heap of ruins of which he could not relate some history, comic or pathetic, or he invented one; but he never produced the impression that he was giving a lecture. He had in fact a particularly unpretending way of telling an appropriate and not too lengthy anecdote; he never handed it round on a waiter, as it were, for examination, but let it drop quietly out of his pocket. His knowledge of art was but shallow, but his feeling for it, like all his instincts, was amazingly keen. His information on all subjects was miscellaneous and slender, not an article of his intellectual wardrobe — as Charles Lamb has it — was whole; but he draped

himself in the rags with audacious grace and made no attempt to hide the holes.

Truyn and his little daughter often joined them in these expeditions, and sometimes Cecil, but only when his mother did not choose to go out, and his demeanor on these occasions — 'peripatetic æsthetics' he called their walks — was highly characteristic. He would walk by the side of his sister and Sempaly, or a few steps behind them, sunk in silence but always sharply observant. From time to time he would correct their *cicerone* in his dates, which Sempaly took with sublime indifference and for which — taking off his hat — he invariably thanked him with princely courtesy. Sterzl only sympathized with the classical style of the Renaissance; the real antiques which Zinka raved about he smiled at as caricatures; Guido on the other hand — for whom Sempaly had a weakness, as a Chopin among painters — Sterzl detested. He declared that the Beatrice Cenci had a cold wet bandage on her head, and that the picture was nothing more than a study apparently made from an idiot in a mad-house. When Zinka talked of her favorite antiques or other works in the mystical and sentimental slang of the clique, he laughed at her, but quite good-naturedly. He scorned all extravagance and raptures as cant and

affectation. Still he was merciful to his sister, and when she turned from a Francia with tears in her eyes, or turned pale as she quoted Shelley, or spoke of Leonardo's Medusa in Florence, he did no more than shrug his shoulders and say: "Zinka, you are crazy," or gently pull her by the ear. Everything in Zinka was right, even her want of sound common sense.

The baroness had at last found a lodging, almost to her mind: a small palazzo in a side street, off the Corso, "furnished in atrocious taste, but otherwise very nice." The palazetto was in fact a gem in its way, with a simple and elegant stone front and a court surrounded by a colonnade with red camellia shrubs and a fountain in the midst. There were several much injured antique statues too, one of which was a famous and very beautiful Amazon at whose feet a rose-bush bloomed profusely. This Amazon struck Zinka as remarkably picturesque and she sketched her from every point of view without ever reading the warning in her sad face. Alas! Zinka had gazed at the sun and it had blinded her.

But how could Cecil allow this daily-growing intimacy between Sempaly and his sister? Sempaly's elder brother, Prince Sempaly, had been married ten years and was childless, so the

attaché, as heir presumptive, was in duty bound to make a brilliant marriage. Did not Sterzl know this? Yes, he knew it, but he did not trouble his head about it. He was under no illusion as to the singularity, not to say the improbability of Sempaly marrying a girl of inferior birth; he had no desire that it should be otherwise. He was no democrat; on the contrary, his was a particularly conservative and old world nature, equally remote from cringing or from envy. That Sempaly should marry any other girl not his equal in rank would have struck him as altogether wrong, but Zinka — Zinka was different. He worshipped her as only a strong elder brother can worship a much younger weaker sister and there was no social elevation of which he deemed her unworthy. And when he saw Sempaly smile down so tenderly and at the same time so respectfully on his 'butterfly,' as he called her, he was rejoiced at her good fortune and never for an instant doubted it. Zinka was not sentimental. For a long time there was no tinge of any feeling stronger than good fellowship in her intercourse with Sempaly; her talk was all fun, her glance saucy and wilful. By degrees, however, a change came over her; her whole manner softened, there was a gentle dreaminess even in her caprice and

when she smiled it was often with tears in her eyes.

Sempaly was not regular in his visits to the palazetto; sometimes for two or three days he failed to appear, then he would call very early—at noon perhaps, join the family unceremoniously at their breakfast, go out driving with the ladies, accept an invitation to stay to dinner, and if Zinka was looking pale or out of spirits, he would pay her fifty kind little attentions to conjure a smile to her lips. Occasionally he would fall into the melancholy vein and talk of his loveless youth, and let her pity him for it. He would tell her about his elder brother, praising his many noble qualities, and then add with a shrug: "Yes, he is a splendid fellow, but . . . he has ideas!" When Zinka asked what sort of ideas, Sempaly sighed: "I hope you may some day know him and then you can judge for yourself."

But this was in a low tone and he seemed to regret having said it. Then he would frequently allude to this or that picture in his brother's house at Vienna, or to some curious family relic, and say how much he should like some day to show it to Zinka. His favorite theme, however, was Erzburg, the old castle which for numberless generations had been the family summer-retreat

of the Sempalys and of which he was passionately fond. Excepting as regards this estate he was singularly free from all false or family pride; he declared that his brother's Vienna palace was an unhealthy barrack, scouted at the Sempaly breed of horses, laughed at the Sempaly nose, and praised the traditional Sempaly tokay more in irony than in good faith — but then he came round to Erzburg again and simply raved about it. Not about the oriental luxury with which part of the castle was fitted up — not in the best taste—of that he never spoke; indeed, he said more about its deficiencies than its perfections, but in a tone of such loving excuse! He talked of the large bare rooms where, for years, he had watched for the apparition of the white lady, half longing, half dreading to see her; of the doleful groaning of the weather-cock of the *rococo* statues in the grounds, and of the gloomy pools with their low sad murmur, and their carpet of white water-lilies. The statues were bad, the pools unhealthy he admitted, and yet, as he said it, his usually mocking glance was soft and almost devout. Once, when Zinka had grown quite dismal over his reminiscences, he took her hand and pressed it tenderly to his lips: "You must see Erzburg some day," he murmured.

His behavior to her was that of a man who is perfectly clear as to his own intentions but who for some reason is not immediately free to sue for the hand of a girl whom in his heart of hearts he already regards as his own. What did he mean by all this? What was he thinking of? I believe absolutely nothing. He went with the tide. There are many men like him, selfish, luxurious natures who swim with the stream of life and never attempt to steer; they have for the most part happy tempers, they are content with any harbor so long as they reach it without effort or damage, and if in their passive course they run down any one else they exclaim with their usual amiable politeness: "Oh! I beg your pardon!" and are quite satisfied that the mishap was due to fate and not to any fault of theirs.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was in the end of February, shortly before the close of the carnival. Truyn, going to the Sterzls' with his little girl to take a walk with Zinka, saw at the door of the palazetto a hackney carriage with a small portmanteau on the top. Sterzl's man-servant, an elegant person with close-cut hair, shaved all but a short beard, and wearing an impressive watch-chain, was condescending to exchange a few words with the driver blinking in the sunshine.

The drawing-room into which Truyn and his daughter were admitted unannounced was in the full blaze of light. The motes danced their aimless rainbow-colored dance; in the middle of the room stood Zinka with both hands on a table over which she was bending to gaze at a magnificent basket of flowers. There was something in her attitude, quaint but graceful, in the elegant line of her bust, the pathetic joy of her radiant face, the soft flow of her plain long dress, which stamped the picture once and for ever on Truyn's memory. A sunbeam wantoned in her

hair turning it to gold and her whole figure was the embodiment of sweet and happy spring delight. The basket of flowers, too, was a masterpiece of its kind—a *capriccio* of lilies of the valley, gardenias, snow-flakes, and pale-tinted roses, that looked as though the wayward west-wind had blown them into company. Sterzl was standing by, with a pleased smile, and the baroness, in an attitude of affected astonishment, stood a little apart with a visiting-card in her hand. Neither Cecil nor his sister — she absorbed in the flowers and he in gazing at her — had heard Truyn arrive. When he knocked at the door the baroness said "come in," and gave him the tips of her fingers; then, with a wave of her hand towards the basket, she lisped out: "Did you ever see such extravagance!"

Zinka looked up and welcomed him and so did Sterzl. "It is perfect folly . . . quite reckless. . ." sighed the baroness, "such a basket of flowers costs a fortune. Why, only one gardenia. . ."

Zinka's underlip pouted impatiently and Sterzl said in his dry way:

"My dear mother, do not destroy Zinka's illusions; the basket fell from heaven expressly for her and she does not want to believe that it was bought, just like any other, in the Via Condotti or

Babuino. What do you say, Count? Sempaly sent it to her to console her for the departure of her brother. The reason is too absurd, do not you think? I do not believe you would miss me particularly for a few days, child?" and he put his hand affectionately under her chin.

"Where are you off to so suddenly?" asked Truyn very seriously.

"To Naples. Franz Arnsperg has telegraphed to me to ask me to meet him there; he is on his way to Paris from Constantinople, and he is a great friend of mine and has come by way of Naples on purpose that we may meet."

"The Arnsperg-Meiringens; you know their property adjoins ours," the baroness explained. Sterzl, who knew very well that Truyn was far better informed as to the Arnsperg-Meiringens than his mother, was annoyed and uncomfortable. However, he kissed her hand and then turned to his sister:

"God shield you, my darling butterfly—write me a few lines, or is that too much to ask?" Then he kissed her and whispered: "Mind you have not lost those bright eyes by the time I return."

Truyn accompanied him to the carriage with a very long face; he and General von Klinger had watched Sempaly's conduct with much disquietude,

they knew him to be susceptible but not impressionable, alive to every new emotion; and Truyn would ere this have spoken to Sempaly on the subject if he had not been sure that it would merely provoke and irritate him without producing any good effect; the general, on the other hand, could not make up his mind to open Sterzl's eyes to the state of affairs because, like Baron Stockmar, he had an invincible dislike to interfering in matters that did not concern him. Like that famous man, not for worlds would he have committed an indiscretion to save a friend for whom he would have sacrificed his life; and this terror of being indiscreet is a form of cowardice which is considered meritorious in the fashionable world.

CHAPTER X.

IT is Shrove Tuesday. The sorriest jade of the wretchedest *botta* has a paper rose stuck behind his ear, though during the hours sacred to the carnival they are pariahs and outcasts from the Corso. Two-horse carriages are dressed in garlands and the horses have plumes on their heads. The Piazza di Spagna is alive with pedlars and hawkers, selling flowers and little tapers (*moccoli*), and with buyers of every nation doing their best to cheapen them. Baskets full of violets, roses, anemones, snowflakes — baskets full of indescribable bunches of greenery — the ammunition of the mob which have already done duty for two or three days and are like nothing on earth but the wisps of rushes with which the boards are rubbed in some parts of Austria. The sellers of coral and tortoise-shell cry out to you to buy — "*e carnevale. . .*" and in the side streets — for misery dares not show its head in the main thoroughfares to-day — the beggars crowd more closely than ever round the pedestrian with their perpetual cry: "*muojo di fame.*"

The houses on the Corso wear their gay carnival trappings to-day for the last time. A smart dress flutters on every balcony, several stands have been erected and all the window-sills are covered, some with colored chintz and some with gold brocade. All Thursday, Saturday, and Monday Zinka and Gabrielle had driven unweariedly up and down the Corso with Count Truyn, flinging flowers at all their acquaintances and at a good many strangers. To-day, however, they had agreed to look on from the windows of the Palazzo Vulpini, for the close of the carnival is apt to be somewhat riotous. Every one who lives on the Corso seizes the opportunity of paying long owing debts of civility and offers a place in a window to as many friends as can possibly be squeezed in.

There was a large party at the Vulpinis', for the most part Italians and relations of the prince's. Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson had invited themselves, and Zinka, with Gabrielle Truyn, was to see the turmoil in the Corso from the balcony of the palazzo. The baroness had "tic douloureux" which kept her at home,—and which no one regretted. At six o'clock, before the beginning of the *moccoli*, all the company were to go to the '*Falcone*,' a well-known and especially Roman restaurant where they would dine more

comfortably and easily than at home. From thence they were to adjourn to the *Teatro Costanzi.* Prince Vulpini had drawn up this thoroughly carnival programme for the special benefit of the Countess Schalingen who had a passion for "local color," and who was enchanted. The princess was resigned; local color had no interest for her and she was somewhat prejudiced against Italian native dishes and masked festivities of all kinds.

It was three o'clock. Baskets of flowers and whole heaps of sweet little sugar-plum boxes were ready piled in the windows for ammunition. The little Vulpinis, who entirely filled the large centre window, and their shy English governess in her black gown, had just come into the room, skipping about and pulling each other's hair for sheer impatience and excitement; and when their governess reproved them for behaving so roughly "*ma è carnevale*" is thought sufficient excuse; the company laughed and the English girl said no more. All the party had assembled. Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson were both looking pretty and picturesque; the former had stuck on a fez, and the other a quaintly-folded handkerchief of oriental stuff, in honor of the carnival, when eccentricity of costume is admissible and conventional head-gear are contemned.

From the windows down to the carriages, from the carriages up to the windows the war was eagerly waged; bunches of flowers, and bonbonnières from Spillman's and Nazzari's fly in all directions and scraps of colored paper fall like snow through the air. Then the blare and pipe of a military band came up from the Piazza di Venezia and the maskers crowded in among the carriages. One of the liveliest groups along the Corso was certainly that where the Vulpini children were grouped, with Zinka in their midst, she having undertaken the charge of them at their own earnest entreaty. She and Gabrielle were both laughing with glee, but at the height of their fun they remembered to pay all sorts of little civilities to the half-scared English governess and had stuck a splendid bunch of lilies of the valley in front of her camphor-scented black silk dress. What especially interested the children was watching for Norina's carriage, for they not only recognized the prince who was driving, but knew all his party: Truyn, Siegburg, Sempaly, and as it passed with its four bays the little Vulpinis jumped with delight and chirped and piped like a tree full of birds; the gentlemen waved their hands, smiled, and gallantly aimed bouquets without end at the windows of the palazzo. But all the finest flowers

that day were, beyond a doubt, aimed at Zinka. The floor all round her was heaped with snow-flakes, and violets, and roses. In her hand she had caught a huge bunch of roses flung up to her by Sempaly.

"Oh, oh!" cried Madame de Gandry, retiring from the window to rest for a few minutes and refresh herself with a sip of wine. "Ah, mademoiselle!" glancing enviously at the mass of blossoms strewn round Zinka, "you have as many bouquets as a prima donna!" Zinka nodded; then, contemplating her hat, which she had thrown off in her excitement, with a whimsical air of regret and pulling the feather straight she said with a mockery of repentance:

"My poor hat will be glad to rest on Ash Wednesday."

"It is perfect, Marie, really perfect, this Roman carnival — a thing never to be forgotten!" exclaimed the Countess Schalingen, coming in from the window. She was a genuine Austrian, always ready to go into ecstasies of enthusiasm.

"It is horrid," answered the princess impatiently. "Under the new government it is nothing but an amusement for the strangers and street boys."

The *Barberi* have rushed past, and the procession has once more begun to move on but its interest and excitement are over; the crowd in the road begins to thin, and Sempaly, Truyn, Norina, Siegburg, and the general have come in, as agreed, to escort the ladies to the 'Falcone.' The children have all been kissed and sent off to their dinner at home; Gabrielle somewhat ill-pleased at not being allowed to go with the elder party and Truyn himself not liking to part with his little companion. Zinka wishes to comfort Gabrielle by remaining with the little ones, but this was not to be heard of.

"Only too many of us would wish to follow your example," whispers Princess Vulpini, to whom this dinner at a Roman restaurant is detestable.

"They are to go on foot, but they are so long getting ready after this little delay that the one peaceful half-hour before the *moccoli* is lost; by the time they sally into the street the crowd, which had dispersed, is getting denser every minute. The darkness comes on rapidly, like a grey curtain let down suddenly from the skies; the gaudy hangings are being taken in from the windows lest they should catch fire; the carnival is putting on its ball-dress. Now the first twink-

ling tapers are seen here and there, like glow-worms in the dusk, and are instantly pelted with *mazetti* and bunches of greenery, mostly picked up from the pavement. "*Fuori! fuori!*" is the monotonous cry on every side, and presently: "*senza moccolo, vergogna!*" — the death cries of the carnival.

The Austrian gentlemen find their position anything rather than pleasant, for it is impossible to protect the ladies effectually against being jostled and pushed, still less against hearing much rough jesting. At last they are out of the Corso and have divided in the narrow streets; some having turned into the Via Maddalena, while others have crossed the Piazza Capranica to the Piazza della Rotunda; but at last they are all met after various small adventures at the '*Falcone.*' The ladies' toilets have suffered a little and Princess Vulpini looks very unhappy.

The '*Falcone*' is a very unpretending restaurant where the waiters wear white jackets; the tariff is moderate and the *risotto* celebrated. Vulpini orders a thoroughly Italian dinner in an upper room.

Suddenly Truyn exclaims in dismay: "What has become of Zinka and Sempaly?"

"They have lingered talking on the way,"

says Madame de Gandry with pinched lips as she leans back in her chair and pulls off her gloves. "People always walk slowly when they have so much to say to each other."

Truyn frowned. "I am afraid they have got entangled in the crowd and have not been able to make their way out. I have hated this expedition from the first. I cannot imagine, Marie, what could have put such a plan into your head. . ."

"Mine!" says his sister in an undertone and with a meaning glance. But she says no more. He knows perfectly well that she is as innocent of the scheme as the angels in heaven.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" asks Vulpini pouring huge quantities of grated cheese into his soup, while Mrs. Ferguson complains that she is dying of hunger, which is singular, considering the enormous number of bonbons she has eaten in the course of the day. Madame de Gandry asks for a series of French dishes which the '*Falcone*' has never heard of. Countess Schalingen is loud in her praises of the Italian cookery and is only sorry that she has no appetite.

Truyn and the general sat gazing at the door in growing anxiety; Zinka and Sempaly do not make their appearance — Truyn can hardly conceal his alarm.

"I certainly cannot understand what you are so uneasy about," says Madame de Gandry with a perfidious smile; "if Fräulein Zinka has been mobbed and hindered Sempaly is in the same predicament and will take good care of her. If she were with any one less trustworthy, less competent, with whom she was less intimate . . . then I could understand. . ." Truyn passes his hand over his grey hair in extreme perplexity and mutters in his mother tongue: "This woman will be the death of me!" and then he again blames his sister.

Yet another quarter of an hour; though the waiters are not nimble they have got to the dessert and still no signs of Sempaly and Zinka.

"I am beginning to feel very anxious," says Marie. "I only hope the child has not fainted in the crowd."

Madame de Gandry makes a meaning grimace. "It is perhaps the cleverest thing she could have done," she says. Truyn hears and bites his lip.

The door just now opens and Zinka and Sempaly come in; she calm and sweet, he dark and scowling.

"Thank God!" cries Truyn.

"What in the world has happened?" asks the princess, while Truyn draws a chair to the table

for Zinka, next to himself. "What has happened?" repeated Sempaly. "The most obvious thing in the world. We got into the thick of the mob and could not get through."

"I cannot understand how that should have occurred," says Madame de Gandry. "We all came through."

"You may perhaps recollect that we were the last of the party, countess; we had hardly gone twenty yards when the crowd had become a compact mass, we pressed on, determined to get through at any cost—alone I could have managed it — but with a lady — suddenly we were in the thick of a furious squabble — curses, blows, and knives. I cannot tell you how miserable I was at finding myself out in the street with a lady — a young girl. . ."

"Fräulein Sterzl seems to take it all much more coolly than you do, Count Sempaly," interposes Madame de Gandry spitefully; "she does not appear to have been at all terrified by the adventure."

"Fräulein Zinka was very brave," replied Sempaly.

"Goodness me! what was there to be afraid of;" says Zinka with the simplicity of childish in-

nocence. "The responsibility was Count Sempaly's not mine."

The French woman laughs sharply. "We must be moving now," she says, "if we mean to go to Costanzi's," and there is a clatter of chairs and a little scene of confusion in which no one can find the right shawl or wrap for each lady.

But Princess Vulpini makes no attempt to move: "I am going nowhere else this evening," she says with unwonted determination. "I will not take Zinka to Constanzi's. I will wait till she has eaten her beef-steak and then I will take her home. I hope you will all enjoy yourselves."

Zinka eats her beef-steak with the greatest calmness and an unmistakably good appetite; she is perfectly sweet and docile and natural; she has no suspicion that her name will to-morrow morning be in every mouth. Truyn is as pale as death; he has heard Madame de Gandry's whisper to her friend: "After this he must make her an offer."

PART II.

LENT.

CHAPTER I.

"I AM glad to have found you," cried Truyn next morning as he entered Sempaly's room in the Palazzo di Venezia, and discovered him sipping his coffee after his late breakfast, with a book in his hand.

"I am delighted that you should for once have taken the trouble to climb up to me. I must show you my Francia—the dealer who sold it to me declares it is a Francia. But you look worried. What has brought you here?"

"I only wanted to know—to ask you whether you will drive out to Frascati with us to-day?"

"To Frascati!—This afternoon? What an idea!" exclaimed Sempaly; "and in any case I cannot join you for I am going to the Palatine at three o'clock with the Sterzls."

"Yes?" said Truyn looking uncommonly grave.

"May I offer you a cup of coffee?" asked Sempaly cooly.

"No thank you," replied Truyn shortly. He was evidently uneasy, and began examining the odds and ends at the table to give himself countenance; by accident he took up the book that Sempaly had been reading when he came in. It was Charles Lamb's Essays, and on the first page was written in a large, firm hand: "In friendly remembrance of a terrible quarrel, Zinka Sterzl."

"The child lost a bet with me not long since," Sempaly explained. "Another bet is still unsettled and is to be decided to day at the Palatine." Truyn shut the book sharply and threw it down; then, setting his elbows on the table at which they were sitting, and fixing his eyes keenly on Sempaly's face he said:

"Do you intend to marry Zinka Sterzl?"

Sempaly started. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed; "what are you dreaming of?" But as Truyn said no more, simply gazing fixedly at him, he took up an attitude of defiance. He looked Truyn straight in the face with an angry glare and retorted:

"And suppose I do?"

"Then I can only hope you will have enough resolution to carry out your intentions," said

Truyn, "for to stop half-way in such a case is a crime."

He drew a deep breath and looked at the ground. But Sempaly's face, instead of clearing, grew darker; he was prepared for vehement opposition and his cousin's calm consent, not to say encouragement, put him in the position of a man who, after straining every muscle to lift a heavy weight suddenly discovers that it is a piece of painted pasteboard. It completely threw him off his balance.

"Well, I must say!" he began in a tone of extreme annoyance, "you speak of it as if it were a no more serious question than the dancing of a cotillon. In plain terms the thing is impossible. What are we to live on? I have long since run through all my fortune, if I took what my brother would regard as so monstrous a step he would cut off all supplies, and Zinka is not of age. I might to be sure take to selling dripping to maintain my wife, which would have the additional advantage that my mother-in-law would cut me in consequence. Or perhaps you would advise me to let Dame Clotilde Sterzl keep us till Zinka comes into her money?"

"Well," says Truyn calmly, "if you can take such a reasonable view of the impossibility of your

marriage with Zinka Sterzl, your behavior to her is perfectly inexplicable."

Truyn was still sitting by the little table on which the pretty coffee service was set out, while Sempaly, his hands in his pockets, was walking up and down the room, kicking and shoving the furniture with all the irritation of a man who knows himself to be in the wrong.

"Upon my soul I cannot make out what you would be at!" he suddenly exclaimed, standing still and facing his cousin. "Sterzl has never found any fault with my behavior and it is much more his affair than yours."

Truyn changed color a little, but did not lose his presence of mind.

"Sterzl, with all his dryness of manner, is an idealist," he said, "who would fetch the stars from heaven for his sister if he could. He has never for an instant doubted that your intentions with regard to her were quite serious."

"That is impossible!" cried Sempaly.

"But it is so," Truyn asserted. "He is too blind to think his sister beneath any one's notice."

"And he is right!" exclaimed Sempaly, "perfectly right—but the pressure of circumstances—of position—the duties I have inherited. . . ."

He had seated himself on the deep inner ledge

of one of the windows, with his elbows on his knees and his chin between his hands, and was staring thoughtfully at the floor.

"Allow me to ask you," he said, "what induced you to mix yourself up in the affair?"

"It has weighed on my mind for a long time," said Truyn, "but what especially moved me to speak of it to-day is the circumstance that last evening, before you came into the '*Falcone*,' Mesdames De Gandry and Ferguson allowed themselves to speak in a way which convinced me that your constant intimacy with Zinka is beginning to do her no good."

"Oh! of course, if you listen to the gossip of every washerwoman," Sempaly interrupted angrily. And he muttered a long speech in which the words: 'Sacred responsibility — due regard for the duties imposed by Providence,' were freely thrown in. Truyn's handsome face flushed with contempt and at length he broke into his cousin's harangue, to which for a few minutes he had listened in silence:

"No swagger nor bluster. . . . The matter is quiet simple: Do you love Zinka?" The attaché frowned:

"Yes," he said fiercely.

"Then it is only that you have not the courage:

to face the annoyances that a marriage with her would involve you in?"

Sempaly was dumb.

"Then, my dear fellow, there is no choice; you must break off the intimacy, as gently but as immediately as possible."

"That I neither can nor will attempt," cried Sempaly, stamping his foot.

"If within three days you have not taken the necessary steps to secure your removal from Rome, I shall feel myself compelled to give Sterzl a hint—or your brother—whichever you prefer." Truyn spoke quite firmly. "And now good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Sempaly without moving, and Truyn went to the door; there he paused and said hesitatingly: "Do not take it amiss, Nicki—I could do no less. Remember that though the right is a bitter morsel, it has a good after-taste."

"Poor child, poor sweet little girl!" Truyn murmured to himself as he descended the grey stone stairs of the Palazzo de Venezia. "Is this a time to be talking of inherited responsibilities and the duties of position—now! Good heavens!" He lighted a cigar and then flung it angrily away. "Good heavens! to have met a girl like Zinka—to have won her love—and to be free! . . . ."

He hurried out into the street, leaving the

gate-porter astonished that the count, who was usually so courteous, should have taken no notice of his respectful bow; such a thing had never happened before.

He was a strange man, this grey-haired young Count Truyn; he had grown up as one of a very happy family and when still quite young he had been hurried, much against his will, into a marriage with the handsome Gabrielle Zinsenburg. He had never been able to reconcile himself to the empty wordliness of his life in her society; she was a heartless, superficial woman, some few years older than himself, who had staked everything on her hope of achieving a marriage with him. Within a few years they had separated, quite amiably, by mutual consent; he had given her his name and she gave him his child. His life was spoilt. He had a noble and a loving heart but he might not bestow it on any woman; he must carry it about in his breast where it grew heavy to bear. His love for his little girl, devoted as he was to her, was not enough to live by, and a bitter sense of craving lurked in his spirit. For many years he had lived a great deal abroad; his mind had expanded and he had shed several of his purely Austrian prejudices. At home he was still regarded as a staunch conservative because

he always passively voted on that side; but he was only indifferent, absolutely indifferent, to all political strife, and smiled alike at the recklessness of the 'left' and the excitability of the 'right,' while in his inmost soul he regarded the perfecting of government as mere labor lost; for he was no optimist, and thought that to heal the woes of humanity nothing would avail but its thorough regeneration, and that men have no mind for such regeneration; all they ask is to be allowed to cry out when they are hurt, and shift their sins on to each other's shoulders.

It afforded him no satisfaction to cry out. His weary soul found no rest but in unbounded benevolence, and Sempaly's nature — experimental, groping his way through life — had seemed to him to-day more odious than ever.

"How can a man be at once so tender and such a coward?" he asked himself. "He is the most completely selfish being I ever met with — a thorough epicurean in sentiment, and has only just heart enough for his own pleasure and enjoyment."

The bet outstanding between Zinka and Sempaly was not decided that afternoon. Sempaly

did not go to the Palatine, but excused himself at the last moment in a little note to Zinka. Truyn's words, though he would not have admitted it to himself, had made a very deep impression, and though he fought against it he could no longer avoid looking the situation in the face. To get himself transferred to some other capital, to give up all his pleasant idle habits here — the idea was intolerable! He felt exactly like a man who has been suddenly roused from a slumber bright with pleasant dreams. He did not want to wake, or to rub his eyes clear of the vision.

Was everything at an end then? Truyn had, to be sure, suggested an alternative: if he could but call up sufficient energy it rested only with himself to turn the sweet dream into a still sweeter and lovelier reality, and his whole being thrilled with ecstasy as this delightful possibility flattered his fancy. He was long past the age at which a man commits some matrimonial folly believing that he can reclaim the morals of some disrespectable second-rate actress, or that his highest happiness is to devote his life to his sister's governess who is a dozen years older than himself; when he contemplated the possibility of his marrying Zinka Sterzl after all, it was with the certainty that his feeling for her was not a mere transient madness,

but that it had its roots in the depths of his nature. Every form and kind of enjoyment had been at his command and he had hated them all. Things in which other men of his age and position could find excitement and interest roused his fastidious nature to disgust. Life had long since become to him a vain and empty show, when he had met Zinka . . . . Then all the sweetest spirits of spring had descended fluttering into his vacant heart; a magical touch had made it a garden of flowers and filled it with fair, mad dreams of love. All the "sweet sorrow" of life was revealed to him in a new form. . . And now was he to tread the blossoms into dust? "Give up seeing her — get myself sent away — never! I cannot and I will not do it," he muttered to himself indignantly as he thought it all over. "What business is it of Truyn's? What right has he to issue his orders to me?"

But when he had resolved simply to go on with Zinka as he had begun, to sun himself as heretofore in her smile, her gentleness, and her beauty, he was still uncomfortable. He felt that it would not be the same. Till now his heart had simply been content, now it could speak and ask for more; to try to satisfy it with this shadow of delight was like attempting to slake a raging thirst

with the dew off a rosebud. He loved her now—suddenly and madly. Interesting women had hitherto utterly failed to interest him; they were like brooklets filled by the rain: the muddiness of the water prevented their shallowness being immediately perceptible; the storms of life had spoilt their clearness and purity; Zinka, on the contrary, was like a mountain lake whose waters are so transparent that near the shore every pebble is visible; and though, in the middle, the bottom is no longer seen, it is because they are deep and not because they are turbid, till their crystalline opacity reflects the sky overhead. And in the depths of that lake, he thought, lay a treasure which one alone, guided and blest by God, might hope to find. How he longed to sound it.

She was made for him; never for an instant had he been dull in her society; she satisfied both his head and his heart; all the bewitching inconsistency and contradictions of her nature captivated him; he had said of her that "she was like a little handbook to the study of women," she was made up of such a variety of characteristics. In the midst of her childlike moods she had such unexpected depth of thought, such flashes of wisdom; her wildest vagaries were so original and often ended so suddenly in wistful reverie; her little

selfish caprices were the converse of such devoted self-sacrifice; her grace was so spontaneous, her voice so soft and appealing . . . Well, but should he? . . . No, it must not be. Truyn had said it—he must quit Rome — the sooner the better.

He took his hat and went out to call on the ambassador and discuss the matter with him. His excellency was not at home and Sempaly betook himself to the club, where he lost several games at ecarté — he was greatly annoyed. Then he went home and sat looking constantly at the clock as though he were expecting some one; his irritation increased every minute.

CHAPTER II.

"BRIGHT May — the sweetest month of Spring;
The trees and fields with flowers are strown —
Dear Heart, to thee Life's May I bring;
Take it and keep it for thine own —
Nay — draw the knife! — I will not start,
Pierce if thou wilt, my willing breast.
There thou shalt find my faithful heart
Whose truth in death shall stand confessed."

These words, sung in the Roman dialect to a very simple air, came quavering out of the open window of the drawing-room of the Sterzls' palazetto as Sempaly passed by it that evening; he had gone out to pay some visits, to divert his mind, and though his way did not take him along the side street in which the palazetto stood, he had not been able to resist the temptation to make a détour. It was a mild evening and the tones floated down like an invitation; he recognized Zinka's voice as she sang one of the melancholy *Stornelli* in which the peasants of the Campagna give utterance to their loves. It ceased, and he was just moving away, when another even sweeter and more piercing lament broke the warm silence.

"Or shall I die?— Poison itself could have
No terrors if I took it from thy hand.
Thy heart should be my death-bed and my grave."

The passionate words were sung with subdued vehemence to a rather monotonous tune — like a faded wreath of spring flowers borne along by some murmuring stream. He turned back, and listened with suspended breath. The song ended on a long, full note; he felt that he would give God knows how much to hear the last line once more:

'*La sepoltura mia sara il tuo seno!...*'

Now Zinka was speaking — it vexed him beyond measure that he could not hear what she was saying. It was maddening... Good heavens! what a fool he was to stand fretting outside!

When he went into the drawing-room to his great surprise he was met by Sterzl.

"Back so soon?" he exclaimed as he shook hands with him.

"Yes, Arnstein had only two days to spare in Naples," replied Sterzl; "I was delighted to see him again, but—well, I must be growing very old,

I was so glad to find myself at home again," and he drew his sister to him and lightly stroked her pretty brown hair. His brotherly caress added to Sempaly's excitement. "No wonder that you like your home!" he was saying, when the baroness appeared with an evening wrap on her shoulders, a fan and scent-bottle in her hand, and, as usual, dying of refinement and airs.

"Not ready yet, Zenaïde? Ah, my dear Sempaly, how very sweet of you!" and she gave him the tips of her fingers.—"We were quite anxious about you when you so suddenly excused yourself from joining us. Zinka was afraid you had taken the Roman fever," she said sentimentally.

"Zinka has an imagination that feeds on horrors," said Sterzl smiling.

"I did think that you must have some very urgent reason," said Zinka hastily and in some confusion.

Sempaly looked into her eyes: "I was doing Ash-Wednesday penance, that was all," he said in a low voice.

"Well, to complete the mortification come now to Lady Dalrymple's," the baroness suggested.

"Oh, be merciful! Grant me a dispensation.

I should so much enjoy a quiet evening," cried Sempaly.

"And I too," added Zinka. "I am utterly sick of soirées and routs. These performances give me the impression of a full-dress review, at which such and such fashionable regiments are paraded."

"Give us a holiday, mother; remember, it is Ash-Wednesday, and we are good Catholics," said her son.

"I had some scruples myself, but the Duchess of Otranto is going," lisped the baroness.

However, when Sempaly had assured her that the Duchess of Otranto was by no means a standard authority in Roman society she yielded to the common desire that they should remain at home, and withdrew to her room to write some letters before tea.

Most men have senses and nerves only in their brain while women, as is well known, have them all over the body; in this respect Sempaly was like a woman. He had senses even in his finger tips — as a Frenchman had once said of him: "il avait les sens poète!" (a poet's nerves). The most trifling external conditions gave him disproportionate pleasure or pain. The smallest detail of ugliness was enough to spoil his appreciation of

the noblest and grandest work of art; he would not have felt the beauty of Faust if he had first read it in a shabby or dirty copy. Now, when the baroness had left the room, there was no detail that could disturb his enjoyment in being with Zinka.

Sterzl had taken up his newspaper; Zinka, at Sempaly's request, had seated herself at the piano. She always accompanied herself by heart and sat with her head bowed a little over the keys and half-shut dreamy eyes. The sober tone of the room, with its tapestried walls and happy medley of knick-knacks, broad-leaved plants, Japanese screens, and comfortable furniture, formed a harmonious background to her slight, white figure. The light of the one lamp was moderated by its rose-colored shade; a subdued *mezza-voce* tone of color prevailed in the room which was full of the scent of roses and violets, and the heavy perfume seemed in sympathy with the gloomy sentiment of the popular love songs. Sempaly's whole nature thrilled with rapturous suspense, such as few men would perhaps quite understand. At his desire Zinka sang one after another of the *Stornelli* . . . her voice grew fuller and deeper . . .

"Do not sing too long, Zini, it will tire you," said her brother.

"Only one more — the one I heard from outside," begged Sempaly, and she sang:

"*La sepoltura mia sara il tuo seno....*"

The words trembled on her lips; her hands slipped off the last notes into her lap. Sempaly took the warm, soft little hands in his own; a sort of delightful giddiness mounted to his brain as he touched them.

"Zinka," he said, "tell me, do you feel a little of what your voice expresses?"

Her eyes met his — and she blinked, as we blink at a strong, bright light; she shrank back a little, as we shrink from too great and sudden joy. Her answer was fluttering on her lips when the door opened — the Italian servant pronounced some perfectly unintelligible gibberish by way of a name, and in marched — followed by her daughter and their Polish swain — the Baroness Wolnitzka.

"Oh, thank goodness, I have found you at home!" she exclaimed. "We counted on finding you at home on Ash-Wednesday. God bless you, Zinka!"

Zinka was petrified. Mamma Sterzl rushed in from an adjoining room at the sound of those rough tones.

"Charlotte!" was all she could stammer out, "Char . . . lotte . . . you . . . here!"

"Quite a surprise, is it not, Clotilde? Yes, the most unhoped-for things sometimes happen. We arrived to-day at three o'clock and called here this afternoon but you were out; so then we decided to try in the evening. It is rather late, to be sure, and I, for my part, should have been here long ago, but Slawa insisted on dressing — for such near relations! Quite absurd . . . but I do not like to contradict her, she is so easily put out — so I waited to dress too."

And the baroness, after embracing her sister and her niece, plumped down uninvited on a very low chair.

She had dressed with a vengeance: a black lace cap was perched on the top of her short, grey hair, with lappets that hung down over her ears. Her massive person was squeezed into a violet satin gown, which she had evidently out-grown, and a lace scarf picturesquely thrown over her shoulders was intended to conceal its defects; her lavender-colored gloves were very short and much too tight, and burst at all the button-holes. Slawa had a general effect of tricolor, and she wore some old jewelry that she had bought of a dealer in antiquities at Verona. She had curled and piled up

her hair after the antique and kept her head constantly turned over her left shoulder, to be as much like the Apollo as possible, at the same time making a grimace as if she were being photographed and wished to look bewitching.

Vladimir Matuschowsky's tall, slouching figure was buttoned into a braided coat; he held a low-crowned hat with tassels in his hand, and glared at the plain dress-coats of the other two men as though they were a personal insult.

"Monsieur Vladimir de Matuschowsky," said the baroness introducing him, "a . . . a . . . friend of the family." But she said it in French: when the Baroness Wolnitzka was at all at a loss she commonly spoke French.

Her sister, who by this time had got over her astonishment, now began to wish to dazzle the new-comers.

"Count Sempaly," she said, presenting the attaché; "a friend of our family . . . my sister, the Baroness Wolnitzka. You have no doubt heard of the famous Slav leader Baron Wolnitzky, who was so conspicuous a figure in forty-eight."

Sempaly bowed without speaking; Baroness Wolnitzka rose and politely offered him her hand: "I am delighted to make your acquaintance," she said. "I have heard a great deal about you; my

sister has mentioned you in all her letters and I am quite *au courant.*"

Again Sempaly bowed in silence and then, retiring into the background while the mistress of the house turned to address Slawa, he said to Sterzl:

"I will take an opportunity of slipping away—a stranger is always an intruder at a family meeting." His manner was suddenly cold and stiff and his tone intolerably arrogant.

Sterzl nodded: "Go by all means," he replied. But Baroness Sterzl perceiving his purpose exclaimed:

"No, no, my dear Sempaly, you really must not run away — you are not in the least *de trop*— and a stranger you certainly can never be."

"It would look as though we had frightened you away, and that I will not imagine," added her sister archly.

So Sempaly stayed; only, perhaps, from the impulse that so often prompts us to drink a bitter cup to the dregs.

"Pray command yourself a little, Zini," whispered Cecil to his sister. "The interruption is unpleasant; but you should not show your annoyance so plainly."

Tea was now brought in; Sterzl devoted him-

self in an exemplary manner to his cousin Slawa, so as to give his spoilt little sister as much liberty as possible. Slawa treated him with the greatest condescension and kept glancing over her huge Japanese fan at Sempaly, who was sitting by Zinka on a small sofa, taciturn and ill-pleased, while he helped her to pour out the tea.

Baroness Wolnitzka gulped down one cup after another, eat up almost all the tea-cake, and never ceased an endless medley of chatter. The young Pole sat brooding gloomily, ostentatiously refused all food and spoke not a word; his arms crossed on his breast he sat the image of the Dignity of Man on the defensive.

"I am desperately hungry," Madame Wolnitzka confessed. "We are at a very good hotel—Hotel della Stella, in Via della Pace; we were told of it by a priest with whom we met on our journey. It is not absolutely first-class — still, only people of the highest rank frequent it; two Polish counts dined at the table d'hôte and a French marquise; — in her case I must own I thought I could smell a rat — I suspect she is running away with her lover from her husband, or from her creditors."

Out of deference to the "highest rank" the baroness had put her hand up to her mouth on the side nearest to the young people as she made this

edifying communication. "The dinner was very good," she went on, "capital, and we pay six francs a day for our board."

"Seven," corrected Slawa.

"Six, Slawa."

"Seven, mamma."

And a discussion of the deepest interest to the rest of the party ensued between the mother and daughter as to this important point. Slawa remained master of the field; "and with wax-lights and service it comes to eight," she added triumphantly.

"I let her talk," whispered her mother, again directing her words with her hand, "she is very peculiar in that way; everything cheap she thinks must be bad. However, what I was going to say was that, to tell the truth, I did not get enough to eat at dinner — there were flowers on the table," — and she reached herself a slice of plum-cake.

At this moment the door opened to admit Count Siegburg.

"Good evening," he began — "seeing you so brightly lighted up I could not resist the temptation to come in and see how you were spending your Ash-Wednesday."

He glanced around at the three strangers and instantly grasped the situation; but, far from tak-

ing the tragical view of it, he at once determined to get as much fun out of it as possible. After being introduced he placed himself in a position from which he could command the whole party, Sempaly included, and converse both with Madame Wolnitzka and her daughter. He addressed himself first to the latter.

"The name of Wolnitzky is known to fame," he said.

"Yes, my father played a distinguished part in forty-eight," replied Slawa.

"Siegburg — Siegburg? . . ." Madame Wolnitzka was meanwhile murmuring to herself. "Which of the Siegburgs? The Siegburgs of Budow, or of Waldau, or. . . ?"

"The Waldau branch," said Baroness Sterzl. "His mother was a Princess Hag," and she leaned back on her cushions.

"Ah! the Waldau Siegburgs! quite the best Siegburgs!" remarked her sister in a tone of astonishment.

"Of course," replied Baroness Sterzl with great coolness, as though she had never in her life spoken to anyone less than "the best Siegburgs."

Madame Wolnitzka arranged her broad face in the most affable wrinkles she could command, and sat smiling at the young count, watching for an

opportunity of putting in a word. For the present, however, this did not offer, for her sister addressed her, asking, in a bitter-sweet voice:

"And what made you decide on coming to Rome?"

"Can you ask? I have wished for years to see Rome, and you wrote so kindly and so constantly, Clotilde—so at length . . ." and here followed the history of the Bernini. "You remember our Bernini, Clotilde?"

Her sister nodded.

"Well, I had the Apollo, the head only, a copy by Bernini. It is a work of art that has been in our family for generations," she continued, turning to Siegburg as she saw that he was listening to her narrative.

"For centuries," added Madame Sterzl.

"I must confess that I could hardly bear to part with it," her sister went on. "However, I made up my mind to do so when Tulpe, the great antiquary from Vienna, came one day and bid for it."

Sterzl, to whom the god's wanderings were known, made some allusion to them in his dry way; on which the Baroness Wolnitzka shuffled herself a little nearer to Siegburg and addressed herself to him.

"You see, count, it was something like what

often happens with a girl: you drag her about to balls for years, take her from one watering-place to another, and never get her off your hands; then you settle down quietly at home and suddenly, when you least expect it, a suitor turns up. I could hardly bear to see the last of the bust I assure you."

"It must indeed have been a harrowing parting," said Siegburg with much feeling.

"Terrible!" said the baroness, "and doubly painful because" — and here she leaned over to whisper in Siegburg's ear — "Slawa is so amazingly like the Bernini. Does not her likeness to the Apollo strike you?"

"I saw it at once — as soon as I came in," Siegburg declared without hesitation.

"Every one says so — well then, you can understand what a sacrifice it was . . . it cuts me to the heart only to think of it. Oh! these great emotions! Excuse me if I take off my cap . . ." and she hastily snatched off the black lace structure and passing her fingers through her thin grey hair with the vehemence of a genius she exclaimed: "Merciful God! How we poor women are ill-used! crushed, fettered . . ."

"Yes, a woman's lot is not a happy one;" said Siegburg sympathetically.

"You are quite an original!" exclaimed her sister, giggling rather uncomfortably — for in good society it is quite understood that when we are suffering under relations devoid of manners, and whom, if we dared, we should shut up at once in a mad-house, we may do what we can to render them harmless by ticketing them with this title — "Quite an original. Are you still always ready to break a lance for the emancipation of our sex?"

"No," replied Madame Wolnitzka, "no, my dear Clotilde, I have given that up. Since I learnt by experience that every woman is ready to set aside the idea of emancipation as soon as she has a chance of marrying I have lost my sympathy with the cause."

"The emancipation of women of course can only be interesting to those who cannot marry," observed Sterzl, who had not long since read an article on this much ventilated question.

"And as there are undoubtedly more women than men in the world, legalized polygamy is the only solution of the difficulty," his aunt asserted.

"Mamma! you really are! . . . " said Slawa with an angry flare.

"Your views are necessarily petty and narrow," retorted her mother. "If I were speaking of

the subject in a light and frivolous tone I could understand your indignation; but I am looking at the matter from a philosophical point of view—you understand me, I am sure, Count Siegburg."

"Perfectly, my dear madam," Siegburg assured her with grave dignity. "You look at the question from the point of national and political economy and from that point of view improprieties have no existence."

Sempaly sat twirling his moustache; Zinka first blushed and then turned pale, while the mistress of the house patted her sister on the shoulder, saying with a sharp, awkward laugh: "Quite an original — quite an original."

But Sterzl, seeing that Siegburg was excessively entertained by the old woman's absurdities, and was on the point of amusing himself still further at her expense by laying some fresh trap for her folly, happily bethought him that the only way to procure silence would be to ask Slawa to sing. So he begged his cousin to give them some national air. Siegburg joined in the request, but Slawa tried to excuse herself on a variety of pretexts: the piano was too low, the room was bad to sing in, and so forth and so forth . . . at last, however, she was persuaded to sing some patriotic songs in which Matuschowsky accompanied her.

Her tall, Walkure-like figure swayed and trembled with romantic emotion, and faithful to the traditions of the "*art frémissant*" — the thrilling school — she held a piece of music fast in both hands for the sake of effect, though it had not the remotest connection with the song she was singing. Her mother sat in breathless silence; tears of admiration ran down her cheeks; like many other mothers, she only recognized those of Slawa's defects which came into conflict with her own idiosyncracy and admired everything else. When Slawa had shouted the last verse of the latest revolutionary ditty, which would have been prohibited in forty-eight, and Sterzl was still asking himself whether it was worse to listen to the mother's tongue or the daughter's singing, Matuschowsky, whose chagrin at the small approval bestowed on his and Slawa's musical efforts had reached an unendurable pitch, observed that it was growing late and that the ladies must be needing rest after all their exertions and fatigues. Madame Wolnitzka hastened to devour the last slice of tea-cake, brushed the crumbs away from her purple satin lap on to the carpet, rose slowly, and made her way with many bows and courtesies towards the door, taking at least half an hour before she was fairly gone.

When his relatives had at length disappeared Sterzl accompanied the two gentlemen, who had also bid the ladies good-night, into the hall, and said good-humoredly to Siegburg:

"You, I fancy, are the only one of the party who has really enjoyed the evening." Siegburg colored; then looking up frankly at his friend he said: "You are not offended?"

"Well — perhaps, just a little," replied Sterzl, with a smile, "but I must admit that the temptation was a strong one."

"And really and truly I am very sorry for you," Siegburg went on, with that ingenuous want of tact that never lost him a friend. "There is nothing in the world so odious as to have a posse of disagreeable relations who suddenly appear and cling on to your coat-tails. I know it by experience. Last spring, at Vienna, half a dozen old aunts of my mother's came down upon us from Bukowina like a snow-storm. . ." Sempaly meanwhile had buttoned himself into his fur-lined coat and said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

THE three days have gone by in which Truyn had desired his cousin to make up his mind — three days since the sudden descent of Baroness Wolnitzka scared away the sweet vision that till then had dwelt in Sempaly's soul and checked the declaration actually on his lips — but he has not yet requested to be removed from Rome. Truyn's eye has been upon him all through these three days, has constantly met his own with grave questioning, as though to say: "Have you decided?"

No, he had not decided. To a man like Sempaly there is nothing in the world so difficult as a decision; fate decides for him — he for himself! Never.

His encounter with the preposterous baroness might silence the avowal he was on the verge of uttering, but it was not so powerful as to banish Zinka's image once and for all from his mind. The silly old woman's chatter he had by this time forgotten; the *Stornelli* that Zinka had been singing still rang in his ears. For two days he had had the resolution to avoid the Palazetto, but he had

seen Zinka for a moment, by accident, yesterday on the Corso. She was in the carriage with Marie Vulpini — she had on a grey velvet dress and a broad-brimmed mousquetaire hat that threw a shadow on her forehead and her golden-brown hair; she held a large bouquet of flowers and was chatting merrily with the little Vulpinis and Gabrielle Truyn; what pretty merry ways she had with children! His blood fired in his veins as their eyes met, and she blushed as she returned his bow. It was the first time she had blushed at seeing him. All that night he dreamed the wildest dreams,— and now he was taking a solitary early walk in the spring sunshine, on the Pincio, lost in thought, but snapping the twigs as he passed along to vent his irritation. More and more he felt that marriage with Zinka was a *sine qua non* of his existence. He had never in his life denied himself a pleasure, and now. . . .

The brilliant March sun flooded the Piazza di Spagna, the waters of the Baracaccia sparkled and danced, reflecting the radiant blue sky, against which the towers of the Trinita dei Monti stood out sharp and clear. All over the shallow steps

of the church models were lounging in the regulation peasant costumes, and blind beggars incessantly muttering their prayers. In front of the Hotel de l' Europe the cab-drivers were sweetly slumbering under the huge patched umbrellas stuck up behind their coach-boxes for protection against the sun or rain. Flower-sellers were squatted on every door-step, and here and there sat a brown-eyed, snub-nosed white Pomeranian dog. The Piazza was swarming with tourists, and Beatrice di Cenci gazed with the saddest eyes in the world out of a photographer's shop at the motley crowd and bustle.

Siegburg, in happy unconsciousness of coming evil, had just come out of Law's, the money changer's, and was inhaling with peculiar satisfaction the delicious pervading scent of hyacinths, when his eye was accidentally attracted by the fine figure of a young English woman who passed him in a closely fitting jersey. He was still watching her when a harsh voice close to him exclaimed:

"Good morning, Count,—what luck!"

He turned round and recognized, under a vast shady hat, the broad, dark face of the Baroness Wolnitzka. Though the day was splendidly fine she had on that most undressed of garments, orig-

inally meant as a protection against rain but subsequently adopted to conceal every conceivable defect of costume, and long since known to the mocking youth of Paris as a '*cache-misère*,' or — to render it freely — a slut-cover; and, though the pavement was perfectly dry, under this waterproof she held up the gown it hid, so high that her wide feet, in their untidy boots with elastic sides, were plainly displayed.

"Ah, baroness!" he said lifting his hat, "I really did not. . . "

"No, you did not recognize me," she said calmly, "that was why I spoke to you. What luck! But you are in the embassy too?"

"Certainly."

"That is the very thing — I have a request to make then. My daughter is most anxious to have an audience of His Holiness. Slawa, you must know, is a fervent Catholic, though, between you and me, it is a mere matter of fashion. Now I, for my part, take a philosophical view of religious matters. At the same time I should be very much interested in seeing the Pope. . . ."

"But the Pope is unfortunately more inaccessible than ever," said Siegburg, "besides, as I do not belong to the Papal Embassy I cannot, I regret to say, give you the smallest assistance."

"That is what my nephew says — it is disastrous, positively disastrous." At this moment Slawa joined them, emerging from Piale's library, in an eccentric *directoire* costume, with a peaked hat and feather, and a pair of gloves, no longer clean, drawn far up over her elbows.

"Ah, good morning," said she, offering the count her finger tips while Matuschowsky, who was in attendance, sulkily bowed.

By this time Siegburg, hemmed in on all sides, began to think the situation unpleasant.

"It is so delightful to meet with a fellow-countryman in a foreign land. . . ." Slawa began.

"Quite delightful," replied Siegburg, thinking to himself: "How am I to get out of this?" when suddenly the absurdity of the thing came upon him afresh, for he heard the baroness once more: "Good morning, Count, what luck!" and at the same moment she bore down on no less a man than Sempaly, who had just come down the sunlit steps, and was crossing the Piazza lost in sullen meditation. "I beg your pardon," he muttered somewhat startled, "I really did not recognize you," and he gazed helplessly into the distance as though he looked for a rescue. But the baroness went on:

"I am so delighted to have met you — I have

a particular request to make: could you not procure me admission to the Farnesina? The Duke di Ripalda is said to be all powerful . . . "

"I am sorry to say it is quite im . . . "

But at this instant a party of foreigners caught Sempaly's eye — two young ladies with a maid. The two girls, tall and straight as pine-trees, both remarkably handsome and dressed in neatly-fitting English linen dresses, were eagerly bargaining with an Italian who had embroidered cambric trimmings for sale, and they seemed to think it a delightful adventure to buy something in the street.

"Two charming girls! surely I know them," cried Madame Wolnitzka. "Are they not the Jatinskys?"

One of the young ladies, looking up, called out: "Nicki, Nicki!" half across the Piazza, with the frank audacity of people who have grown up in the belief that the world was created expressly for their use.

"Excuse me," said Sempaly with a bow to the baroness, "my cousins . . ." and without more ado he made his escape.

"How long have you been here? Where are you staying?"

"We arrived this morning—Hotel de Londres

— mamma wrote to you at once to the embassy . . . Ah, here is another Austrian!" for Siegburg had contrived to join them. "Rome is but a suburb of Vienna after all! But tell me, who on earth were that old fortune-teller and her extraordinary daughter to whom you were both devoting yourselves so attentively?"

The Wolnitzky trio had in the meantime moved away. The baroness very gracious, Slawa very haughty, as became the living representative of the Apollo Belvedere — past the two handsome girls and down the Via Condotti. Suddenly Baroness Wolnitzka stopped:

"I quite forgot to ask Count Sempaly to get me an invitation to the international artists' festival!" she exclaimed, striking her forehead, and she promptly turned about, evidently intending to repair the omission; only Matuschowsky's decided interference preserved Sempaly from her return to the charge.

The scene is now the Pincio — between five and six in the afternoon, the hour when the band plays every day on the great terrace, while the crowd collects to watch the sun set behind St.

Peter's. The reflection of the glow gilds the gravel, glints from the lace on the uniforms and the brass instruments, and throws golden sparks on the water in the wide basin behind the band-stand. The black shadows rapidly lengthen on the grass, and the palmettos, yuccas, and evergreen oaks stand out in rich, deep tones against the sky that fades from crimson to salmon and grey. A special set of visitors haunt the shady side of the Pincio; not the fashionable world: governesses and nurses with their charges, and priests—priests of every degree: the illustrious Monsignori with their finely chiselled features, their upright bearing and their elegant hands; monks, with their bearded faces comfortably framed in their cowls, and whole regiments of priestlings from the Seminaries in their uniforms of every hue; lank, lean figures, with sallow, unformed features.

Separated from these only by a leafy screen the beauty and fashion of Rome drive up and down — the residents in handsome private carriages, the foreigners in hired vehicles of varying degrees of respectability, or even in the humble, one-horse, hackney cab. The crowd grows denser every minute as the stream of Roman rank and wealth swells along the Via Borghese, across the Piazza del Popolo, and up the hill. On the top

of the Pincio the carriages come to a stand-still; gentlemen on foot gather round them, bowing and smiling, the ladies talk across from one victoria to another — all sorts of trivial small-talk, unintelligible to the uninitiated. Up from the gardens which line the road from the Via Margutta, comes a fragrance of budding and growing spring; down below lies Rome, and lording it grandly over the labyrinthine mass of houses and ruins, solemn and severe, its crown touched by the last rays of the vanished sun, stands St. Peter's.

Countess Ilsenbergh's carriage was drawn up side by side with that of Princess Vulpini; the newly-arrived party of the Jatinskys was divided between them; the countess mother reclining indolently with a gracious smile on her lips by the side of Countess Ilsenbergh, while the princess had undertaken to chaperon the young ladies. On the front seat, by his cousin Eugénie — Nini they called her — sat Sempaly. Siegburg was leaning over the carriage door, talking all sorts of nonsense, and relating all the gossip of Rome that was fit for maiden ears to the two new-comers; they, infinitely amused, laughed till their simple merriment infected even Sempaly, who had taken the seat coveted of all the golden youth of Rome — the seat next his

beautiful cousin — in a very gloomy and taciturn humor.

Presently there was an evident sensation among the public; every one was looking in the same direction.

"What is happening?" asked Polyxena, the elder of the two Jatinska girls.

"It must be the Dorias' new drag, or the King," said Princess Vulpini, screwing up her short-sighted eyes. "No," said Siegburg, looking back, "neither. It is Baroness Wolnitzka!"

And in fact, Madame Sterzl's pretty landau, which she had placed at the disposal of her sister for the afternoon, was coming up the road; in it the Wolnitzkas, mother and daughter, both in their finest array. Slawa was leaning back, elegantly languid, while her mother stood up in the carriage and surveyed the world of Rome through an opera-glass. From time to time, either to rest, or because she suddenly lost her balance, she sat down; and then she filled up her time by examining every detail of the trimming and lining of the landau. It was this singular demeanor, combined with her very conspicuous person, that attracted so much attention to the Sterzls' vehicle— an attention which both mother and daughter, of

course ascribed to Slawa's extraordinary resemblance to the Belvedere Apollo.

"Baroness Wolnitzka! the wonderful old woman we saw with you yesterday in the Piazza di Spagna?" cried Polyxena.

"Yes."

"Only think, Nicki," she went on to Sempaly, "mamma knows her?"

"Who is it that I know?" asked her mother from the other carriage.

"Baroness Wolnitzka, mamma; do you see her — out there?"

"Heaven preserve me!" exclaimed the countess fervently. "I do not feel secure of my life when I am near her. She fell upon me to-day in the Villa Wolkonsky."

"How on earth do you happen to know the old woman, aunt?" asked Sempaly irritably.

"Oh! my husband had some political connection with hers," the countess explained. "She is not to be borne, she stuck to me like a leech for half an hour."

"Your conversation must have been very interesting," said Siegburg.

"It did not interest me," replied the countess rather sharply. "She told me how much her journey had cost her, what she pays a day for carriage-

hire, and that when she was young she had singing-lessons of Cicimara. And she chattered endlessly about her sister Sterzl who is living here 'in the first style and knows absolutely none but the crême de la crême'—you laugh! . . ."

"Well, mamma, you must confess that the association of such a name as Sterzl with the cream of society is irresistibly funny," cried Polyxena.

"It was anything rather than funny to me," said the countess ruefully. "By the way, though, she did tell me one thing — that her niece Zenaïde Sterzl . . . Well, what is there to laugh at now?"

"Zenaïde Sterzl! the name is a poem in itself," cried Polyxena; "it is as though an English woman were named Belinda Brown, or a French girl called Roxalane Dubois."

"Well, it seems from what the old woman told me that the fair Zenaïde is about to relinquish the graceless name of Sterzl for one of the noblest names in Austria — that is the old idiot's story. It has not yet been made public, so she could not tell me the bridegroom's name, but Zenaïde is as good as betrothed to a young count — an attaché to the Austrian embassy. Who on earth can it be? — You ought to know!"

"Ah, ah! Is it you?" said Polyxena turning

to Siegburg. But Siegburg shook his head, stroking his yellow moustache to conceal a malicious smile as he watched Sempaly's conspicuous annoyance. "Or is it you, Nicki?" the young countess went on — "I congratulate you on marrying into such a delightful family!"

But such a marked effect of embarrassment was produced by her speech that she was suddenly silent.

"I know nothing of it," said Sempaly with a gloomy scowl. "That old chatterbox's imagination is positively stupendous."

The play of light on the gold lace of the uniforms and the brass instruments is fast fading away and the sheen of the glossy-leaved evergreens is almost extinct. "*Gran dio morir si giovane!*" is the tune the band is playing. The sun is down, the day is dead, night shrouds the scene; the only color left is a dull glow behind St. Peter's like a dying fire.

"At the Ellis' this evening," Siegburg calls out to the ladies as he lifts his hat and turns away. The carriages make their way down the hill, past the Villa Medici, back into Rome, and their steady roar is like that of a torrent rushing to join the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AND LADY JULIA ELLIS — she was an earl's daughter — English people of enormous wealth and amazing condescension, had for many years spent the winters in Rome. In former times the lady's eccentricities had given rise to much discussion; now she was an old lady with white hair, fine regular features and much too fat arms. Like all English women of her day she appeared in a low gown on all occasions of full dress, and was fond of decking her head with a pink feather. Her husband was younger than she was and had a handsome, thoroughly English face, with a short beard and very picturesque curly white hair. His profile was rather like that of Mendelssohn, a fact of which he was exceedingly proud. Besides this he was proud of two other things: of his wife, who had been admired in her youth by King George IV. and of a very old umbrella, because Felix Mendelssohn had once borrowed it. He had a weakness for performing on the concertina and had musical evenings once a week.

It happened that on the occasion when the

Jatinskys first went to one of these parties Tulpin the Russian genius whose great work had served as the introduction to the Ilsenbergh tableaux, was elaborating a new opera to a French libretto on a national Russian story. He was, of course, one of those Russians who combine a passionate devotion to the national Slav cause with a fervent wish to be mistaken for born Parisians wherever they appear. The piano groaned under his hands, while sundry favorite phrases from *Orphée aux Enfers* and other well-known works were heard above the rolling sea of tremolos. From time to time the performer threw in a word to elucidate the situation: "The czar speaks. . ." "The bojar speaks. . ." "The peasant speaks. . ." "The sighing of the wind in the Caucasus. . ." "The foaming of the torrent. . ." While Mr. Ellis, who believed implicitly in the opera, was heard murmuring: "Splendid! . . . magnificent! The opera must be worked out—it must not remain unperformed!"

"Worked out!" sighed Tulpin with melancholy irony. "That is no concern of mine. We—we have the ideas, the working out we leave to—to—to others, in short. You must remember that I cannot read a note of music—literally, not a note," he repeated with intense and visible satisfaction, and he flung off a few stumbling arpeggios, while

Mr. Ellis cried: "Astonishing!" and compared him with Mendelssohn, which Tulpin, who believed only in the music of the future, took very much amiss. A *Grand Prix de Musique*, from the French academy of arts at the Villa Medici, who had been waiting more than an hour to perform his "Arab symphony," muttered to himself: "Good heavens! leave music to us, and let us be thankful that we are not great folks!"

At last Lady Julia took pity on her guests and invited them to go to take tea; every one was only too glad to accept, and in a few minutes the music room was almost empty. Madame Tulpin, out of devotion, the *Grand Prix* out of spite, and Mr. Ellis out of duty were all that remained within hearing. In the adjoining room every one had burst into conversation over their tea; still, a certain gloom prevailed. Melancholy seemed to have fallen upon the party like an epidemic, and the subject that was most eagerly discussed was the easiest mode of suicide.

Tulpin rattled and thumped on; suddenly he stopped—the Jatinskys had come in, and their advent was such a godsend that even the genius abandoned the piano in their honor. They all three were smiling in the most friendly — it might almost be said the most reassuring manner; for

Countess Ilsenbergh had not failed to impress upon them the very mixed character of Roman society, and, feeling their own superiority, they were able to cover their self-consciousness with the most engaging amiability. The two younger ladies were surrounded — besieged — and the strange thing was that the women paid them even greater homage than the men. Everything about them was admired: their small feet, their finely-cut profiles, their incredibly slender waists, the color of their hair, the artistic simplicity of their dresses — and bets were laid as to whether these were the production of Fanet or of Worth. But now there was the little commotion in the next room that is caused by the arrival of some very popular person. Zinka, without her mother, under her brother's escort only, came in and gave her slim hand with an affectionate greeting to the lady of the house.

"You are an incorrigible truant, you always come too late;" said Lady Julia in loving reproach.

"Like repentance and the police," said Zinka merrily; and then Lady Julia introduced her to Countess Jatinska.

"But you must help me with the tea; you know I always reckon on you for that," Lady Julia

went on. "Give your charming countrywomen some, will you?"

Polyxena and Nini were sitting a yard or two off, surrounded by all the young men of Rome; Zinka was going towards them with her winning grace of manner when Sempaly happened to come up, and found himself so unexpectedly face to face with her that he had no alternative but to shake hands, and he could not avoid saying a few words. Of course — like any other man in his place — he made precisely the most unlucky speech he could possibly have hit upon:

"We have not met for some time."

She looked him in the face out of half-shut eyes, with her head slightly thrown back, and replied, with very becoming defiance:

"You have carried out the penance you began on Ash-Wednesday!"

"Perhaps," and he could not help smiling.

She shrugged her shoulders: "I had intended to break off our friendship," she went on, "but now that I see the cause of your faithlessness," — and she glanced at the handsome young countesses — "I quite understand it. Will you at any rate do me the favor of introducing me to the ladies?"

"Fräulein Sterzl—" said Sempaly; but hardly

had he uttered the words when a scarcely suppressed smile curled Polyxena's lip. Zinka saw the smile, and she saw too that Sempaly's manner instantly changed; he put on an artificial expression of intolerable condescension.

Zinka turned very pale, her eyes flashed indignantly as she hastily returned the young Austrians' bow and at once went back to her post. Sterzl, who was talking to Truyn in a recess and saw the little scene from a distance, frowned darkly. Sempaly meanwhile seated himself on a stool by his cousins and with his back to the tea-table where Zinka was busying herself.

"So this is the far-famed Zinka Sterzl!" exclaimed Polyxena: "She does credit to your taste, Nicki. But she allows herself to speak to you in a very extraordinary manner; it is really rather too much!" Sempaly made no reply. "She treats you already as if you were her own property."

"But Xena," said Nini, trying to moderate her sister's irony, "at least do not speak so loud."

In a few minutes Mr. Ellis came to announce that Monsieur B. was about to play his 'Arab symphony,' and the company moved back into the drawing-room.

The evening had other treats in store; when

Monsieur B. had done his place was taken by a young Belgian count who devoted all his spare time to the composition of funeral marches, who could also play songs and ballads, such as are usually confined to the streets of Florence or the *cafés chantants* of Paris, arranged for the piano, and who gave a duet between a cock and hen with so much feeling and effect that all the audience applauded heartily, especially the Jatinskys to whom this style of thing was quite a novelty. Then Mrs. Ferguson sang her French couplets, Mr. Ellis played an adagio by Beethoven on the concertina, and then Zinka was asked to sing.

"What am I to sing? You know the extent of my collection," she said with rather forced brightness to Mr. Ellis.

"Oh! a Stornello. We beg for a Stornello," said Siegburg following her to the piano—"*vieni maggio, vieni primavera*," and Lady Julia seconded the request.

Zinka laid her hands on the keys and began. Her voice sounded through the room a little husky at first, but very sweet, like the note of a forest bird.

Never before had she sat down to sing without bringing *him* to her side, even from the remotest corner of the room, at the very first notes;

and now, involuntarily, she looked up to meet his gaze — but he was sitting by Polyxena, on a small sofa, in a very familiar attitude, leaning back, holding one foot on the other knee, and laughing at something that she was whispering to him. Zinka lost her self-command and was suddenly paralyzed with self-consciousness. She could not sing that song before him. Her voice broke; she forgot the accompaniment; felt about the notes, struck two or three wrong chords and at length rose with an awkward laugh:

"I cannot remember anything this evening!" she stammered.

Polyxena had some spiteful comment to make, of course, and Sempaly grew angry; he was on the point of rising to go to Zinka and console her for her failure, but before he could quite make up his mind to move, Nini had risen. In spite of her shyness she made her way straight across the room to Zinka and said something kind to her. Sempaly stayed where he was; but as they were leaving, he put on Nini's cloak for her, and said in a low tone: "Nini, you are a good fellow!" and he kissed her hand

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Sempaly's attentions had made Zinka the fash-

ion; his sudden discontinuance, not merely of attentions, but of any but the barest civilities, of course, made her the laughing-stock of all their circle. The capital caricature that Sempaly had drawn of Sterzl and his sister that evening at the Vulpinis' was remembered once more; Madame de Gandry, to whom Sempaly had been very civil till he had neglected her for Zinka, showed the sketch to all her acquaintance, with a plentiful seasoning of spiteful insinuations. Every one was ready to laugh at the "little adventuress" who had come to Rome to bid for a prince's coronet and who had been obliged to submit to such condign humiliation.

The leaders of foreign society vied with each other in doing honor to the Jatinskys. Madame de Gandry set the example by giving a party at which Ristori was engaged to recite; Sterzl was of course, invited; his mother and sister were left out. It was the first time since Zinka's appearance at the Ilsenberghs' that she had been omitted from any entertainment, however select. Many ladies of the international circle followed Madame de Gandry's lead, wishing like her to make a parade before the Austrians of their own exclusiveness, and at the same time to be revenged on Zinka for many a saucy speech she had ventured

to make when she was still one of the initiated — of the sacred inner circle. The Italian society of Rome did not of course trouble itself about all these trumpery subtleties, and behaved to Zinka with the same superficial politeness as before.

She, for her part, took no more note of their amenities than she did of the pin-pricks from the other side. If her feelings had not been so deeply engaged by Sempaly she would no doubt have taken all these petty social humiliations very hardly; but her anguish of soul had dulled her shallower feelings. There is a form of suffering which deadens the senses and which mockery cannot touch. It was all the same to her whether she was invited or not — she could not bear to go anywhere. The idea of meeting Sempaly with his cousins was as terrible as death itself. She was an altered creature. A shy, scared smile was always on her lips, like the ghost of departed joys, her movements had lost all their elasticity, and her gait was more than ever like that of an angel whose wings have been clipped.

Baroness Sterzl, of course, still drove out regularly on the Corso, and made the most praiseworthy attempts to keep up a bowing acquaintance with her former friends, and as often as she could she went out in the evening — alone. There

was some consolation too in the proud consciousness of having quarrelled with Madame de Gandry and being on visiting terms with all the Roman duchesses. The only thing that caused her any serious discomfort was her sister Wolnitzka's persistent and indiscreet catechism as to the state of affairs between Zinka and Sempaly. She herself, out of mere idle bragging, had told Charlotte the first day of her arrival in Rome that Zinka's engagement was not yet made public.

Her aunt's coarse remarks and hints were fast driving Zinka crazy when Siegburg fortunately — perhaps intentionally, out of compassion for her — so frightened the mother and daughter, one evening when he met them at the palazetto, by his account of the Roman fever that they were panic-stricken, and fled the very next morning to Naples.

The member of the family who was most keenly alive to the change in their social relations, oddly enough, was Cecil. He had been wont to feel himself superior to these silly class-jealousies, and at the same time had a reasonable and manly dignity of his own that had preserved him from that morbid petulance which sometimes stands in arms against all friendly advances from men who, after all, cannot help the fact of their superior birth.

Democratic touchiness is a disease to which, in the old-world countries where hereditary rank is still a living fact, every man who is not a toady is liable — from Werther downwards — when fate brings him into contact with aristocratic circles. Sterzl had moved in them so long that he was acclimatized; or rather, it had attacked him late in life, and, as is always the case when grown-up men take infantine complaints, with aggravated severity. He attributed all his sister's misery, not to his own want of caution and Sempaly's weakness of character, but to the tyranny of social prejudice; and he turned against society with vindictive contempt, making himself perfectly intolerable wherever he went. Being a well-bred man, accustomed all his life to the graces of politeness, he could not become absolutely ill-mannered — but as ill-mannered as he could be he certainly was: assertive, irritable, always on the defensive, he was constantly involved in some argument or dispute.

Even at home he was not the same; his pride was deeply nettled by Zinka's total inability to hide her suffering, while he felt it humiliating to be able to do nothing to comfort her. At first, in the hope of diverting her thoughts, he would bring her tickets for concerts or the theatre, and give her a thousand costly trinkets, old treasures of

porcelain, carved ivory, and curiosities of art, such as she had once loved. She used to rejoice over these pretty trifles — now she smiled as a sick man smiles at some dainty he no longer has any appetite for. He could see how sincerely she tried to be delighted, but the tears were in her eyes all the while.

This drove Sterzl to desperation. At first he religiously avoided mentioning Sempaly in her presence, but as days and weeks passed and she brought no change in her crushed melancholy, he waxed impatient. He took it into his head that it would be well to open Zinka's eyes with regard to Sempaly. Sterzl himself was energetic, always looking to the future; he had it out with his disappointments and got rid of them, however hard he might have been hit. He had always let things roll if they would not stand, and then set to work to begin again. His great point in life was to see things as they were. Truth was his divinity, and he could not understand that to a creature constituted like Zinka, illusion was indispensable; that she still laid no blame on Sempaly, but only on the alteration in his circumstances — on her own unworthiness — on anything and everything but himself; that it was a necessity of her nature to be able still to love him, even though she knew that

he was lost to her forever. His austere nature could not enter into Zinka's soft and impressible susceptibility.

So when he took to speaking slightingly or contemptuously of Sempaly on every possible opportunity she never answered him, but listened in silence, looking at him with frightened, astonished eyes and a pale face, like a martyr to whom her tormentors try to prove that there is no God. The result of Cecil's well-meant but injudicious proceedings was a temporary coolness between himself and his sister — a coolness which, on his part, lay only on the surface, but which froze her spirit to its depths, and all this naturally tended to add fuel to Sterzl's detestation of Sempaly. The two men were in daily intercourse, and now in a state of constant friction. Sterzl would make biting remarks over the smallest negligence or oversight of which Sempaly might be guilty, and was bitterly sarcastic as to the incompetence of a young connection of the Sempalys who had not long since been attached to the embassy.

"To be sure," he ended by declaring, "in Austria it is a matter of far greater importance that an attaché should be a man of family than that he should know how to spell." To such depths of clumsy rudeness could he descend.

Sempaly, without losing his supercilious good humor, would only smile, or answer in his most piping tones:

"You are very right; the view we take of privilege is quite extraordinary. We should form ourselves on the model of the French corps diplomatique; do not you think so?" For, a few days previously, the Figaro had published a satirical article on the presentation of a plebeian representative of the republic at some foreign court.

Well, Sempaly might have retorted in a much haughtier key—but the lighter his irony the more it exasperated Sterzl.

CHAPTER V.

COUNTESS JATINSKA spent almost the whole of her stay in Rome on her sofa. When she was asked what she thought of Rome she replied that she found it very fatiguing; when the same question was put to her daughters they, on the contrary, declared themselves enchanted. Sempaly knew full well that in all Rome there was nothing they liked better than their ne'er-do-weel cousin. He displayed for their benefit all his most amiable graces; criticised or admired their dresses, touched up their coiffure with his own light hand, faithfully reported to them all their conquests, and made them presents of cigarettes and of trinkets from Castellani's.

When there was nothing else to be done he was ready to attend them — of course, under the charge of some older lady — to see galleries and churches. Polyxena had a way, that was highly characteristic, of rushing past the greatest works with her nose in the air and laughing as she repeated some imbecile remark that she had overheard, or pointed out some eccentricity of tourist

costume. Nini took art more seriously, looked carefully at everything by the catalogue, and even kept a diary. Xena was commonly thought the handsomer and the more brilliant of the sisters, and Sempaly apparently devoted himself chiefly to her, but he decidedly liked Nini best. The hours that he did not spend with his cousins he passed at the club, where he gambled away large sums. Meanwhile, he was looking very ill and complained of a return of old Roman fever.

And what did the world say to his behavior? The phlegmatic Italians did not trouble themselves about the matter; Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson laughed over it; Siegburg pronounced it disgraceful, and Ilsenbergh called it bad taste to say the least. That he ought to have arranged to leave Rome everybody agreed. Princess Vulpini held long and lamentable conferences with General von Klinger—reproaching herself bitterly for not having seen the position of affairs long ago—but she had never attached any importance to Sempaly's marked attentions, having had no eyes for anything but Siegburg's devotion to Zinka, and she had taken a quite motherly interest in what she regarded as a good match for both.

Truyn was perfectly furious with Sempaly. All that he was to Zinka during these weeks can only

be divined by those who have passed through such a time of grief and humiliation, with the consciousness of having a high-souled and tender friend in the back-ground. He was the only person who never aggravated her wound. He had the gentle touch, the delicate skill, which the best man or woman can only acquire through the ordeal of an aching heart. He came every afternoon with his little girl to take Zinka for a walk, for he knew that the regular drive on the Corso could only bring her added pain; and while the baroness, with outspread skirts, drove in the wake of fashion up to the Villa Borghese and the Pincio, these three — with the general, not unfrequently, for a fourth—would wander through silent and deserted cloisters or take long walks across the Campagna. Not once did Truyn bring a secret tear to her eye; if some accidental remark or association brought the hot color to her thin cheek he could always turn the subject so as to spare her.

One sultry afternoon, late in spring, Truyn and his two daughters — as he was wont to call Zinka and Gabrielle — with the soldier-artist were sauntering home, after a long walk, through the sombre and picturesque streets that surround the Pantheon. The neighborhood is humble and wretched, but over a garden wall rose a mulberry

tree in whose green branches a blackbird was singing, and a few red geraniums blazed behind rusty window-bars, bright specks in the monotonous brown; above the roofs bent the deep blue sky; the air was heavy and hot, and full of obscure smells of gutters and stale vegetables. Somewhere, in an upstairs room, a woman sang a love-song of melancholy longing. Suddenly the blackbird and the woman ceased singing at the same time; a dismal howl and groan echoed through the street, and a mass of black shadows darkened the scene. Zinka, who had lately become excessively nervous, started and shuddered.

"It is nothing — only a funeral," Truyn explained, taking off his hat.

That was all — a Roman funeral, grim but picturesque — a long procession of mysteriously-shrouded figures, only able to see through two slits in the sack-like cowls that covered their heads, ropes round their waists, and torches or mystical banners in their hands — banners with the emblems of death. These were followed by a troop of barefooted friars, and last came the bier covered with a bright yellow pall, carried by four more of the shrouded figures, who bent under its weight as they shuffled along. The ruddy flare and the black smoke wreaths, the groan-like chant, the

uncanny glitter of the men's eyes out of the formless hoods — ghastly, ghostly, and exhaling a savor of mouldiness and incense, like the resurrection of a fragment of the middle ages — the procession defiled through the narrow street. Zinka, half-fainting, clung to Truyn; Gabrielle, whose childish nerves were less shocked, watched them with intense curiosity and began to question a woman who stood near her in the crowd that had collected, in her fluent, bungling Italian:

"Who is it they are burying?" she asked at length.

"A woman," was the answer.

"Was she young?"

"*Si.*"

"And what did she die of? of fever?"

"No," said the Roman shrugging her shoulders; and then she added, in the slow musical drawl of the Roman peasant:

"*Di passione.*"

The procession had passed, the chanting had died away; the blackbird was singing lustily once more; they went on their way — Truyn first, with Zinka hanging wearily on to his arm, behind them Gabrielle and the general.

"*Passione!* is that a Roman illness?" she asked with her insatiable inquisitiveness.

"No, it occurs in most parts of the world," said the general drily.

"But only among poor people, I suppose?" said the child.

"No, it is known to the better classes too, but it is not called by the same name," said the old man with some bitterness, more to himself than to Gabrielle.

"Then it is wrong — a shameful thing to die of?" she asked with wide, astonished eyes.

Suddenly the general perceived that Zinka was listening; her head drooped as she heard the child's heedless catechism. He, under the circumstances, would have felt paralyzed — he would not have known what to say to the poor crushed soul; but not so Truyn. He turned to his companion and said something in a low tone. What, the general could not hear, but it must have been something kind and helpful — something which, without any direct reference to the past, conveyed his unalterable respect and regard, for she answered him almost brightly. Then he went on talking of trifles, remembering little incidents of his boyhood, characteristic anecdotes of his parents, and such small matters as may divert a sick and weary spirit, till, when they parted at the door of the palazetto, Zinka was smiling.

"That he has the brains of a genius I will not say, but he has genius of heart, I dare swear!" thought the soldier.

Truyn had gone out riding with her two or three times across the Campagna, and she had enjoyed it; but one day they met Sempaly, galloping with his two handsome cousins over the anemone-strewn sward. From that day she made excuses for avoiding the Campagna — as though she thus avoided the chance, almost the certainty, of meeting him and them. Why then did she remain in Rome at all? Sterzl would not hear of her quitting it, because he thought that the world of Rome would regard it as a flight after defeat. His mother too, on different grounds, set her face against any such abridgment of their stay in Rome. Had she not taken the palazetto till the fifteenth of May?

And did Zinka, in fact, wish to go? She often spoke of longing to be at home again, but whenever their departure was seriously discussed it gave her a shock. She dreaded meeting him — and longed for it all the same. And in the evening when a few old friends dropped in to call — Truyn every evening and Siegburg very frequently — Truyn noticed that every time there was a ring she sat with her eyes fixed in eager

expectation on the door. She still cherished a sort of hope — a broken, moribund hope that was in fact no more than unrest — the vitality of suffering.

PART III.

EASTER.

CHAPTER I.

PASSION-WEEK in Rome, and in all the glory and glow of an Italian spring. The glinting radiance brightens even the mystical gloom of St. Peter's, sparkles for an instant on the holy-water in the basins, wanders from the heads of the gigantic cherubs and the colossal statues down to the inlaid pavement, with the cold sheen of sunlight on polished marble. The hours glide on — the long solemn hours of Holy-Thursday in Rome; the last gleam of daylight has faded away, the vast cathedral is filled with almost palpable twilight and its magnificence seems shrouded in a transparent veil of crape. The stone walls look dim and distant, the fane seems built of shadows, and sacred mystery falls as it were from heaven, deeper and more solemn as the minutes slip by, to sanctify the spot.

In the papal chapel Zinka is kneeling with

Truyn and Gabrielle, her eyes fixed on her hands which are convulsively clasped, and praying with the passion of a youthful nature whose yearning has found no foothold on earth and seeks a home in heaven. On both sides sit the prelates and dignitaries of the church in their carved stalls, inquisitive and prayerless foreigners crowd at their feet. The tragedy of the passion is being recited in a monotonous, inconclusive chant that dies away in the dim corners of the chapel.

The last of the twelve tapers on the altar is extinguished. . . "*Miserere mei*" the choristers cry with terrible emphasis; and then, awful but most sweet, beginning as a mere breath and rising to a mighty wail of grief, comes a voice like the utterance of the anguish of the God of Love over the misery from which He can never release mankind. And before the majesty of that divine and selfless sorrow human sorrow bows in silence.

Zinka bends her head. — It is ended, the last sound has died away in a sob, the crowd rises to follow the procession which, with a cardinal at the head, wends its way through the church.

Truyn and the two girls quit the chapel; behind them the steps of the priests and choristers, drowned in their own echoes, sound like the rustling of angelic wings; the brooding, melancholy

peacefulness has lulled Zinka's heart to rest; for the first time for many weeks she has forgotten. . .

"Most interesting, but the bass was hoarse!"

It was Polyxena Jatinsky who pronounced this summary criticism of the solemn ceremonial, close to Zinka. Zinka looked round; Sempaly with his aunt and cousins were at her side. They had attended the service in reserved places in the choir. Involuntarily yielding to an impulse of pain Zinka pressed forward, but Gabrielle had flown to join them; then she was obliged to stay and talk. The Jatinskys were perfectly friendly, Polyxena giving her her hand — Sempaly alone held aloof. On going out the air struck chill, almost cold, on Zinka's face and she shivered. A well-known voice close behind her said rather brusquely:

"You are too lightly dressed and there is fever in the air. Put this round you," and Sempaly threw over her shoulders a scarf that he was carrying for one of the ladies.

"Thank you, I am not cold; these ladies will want the scarf," said Zinka hastily and repellently.

Polyxena said nothing; perhaps she may have thought it strange that in his anxiety for this little stranger, her cousin should forget to consider that

one of them might take cold. But Nini exclaimed: "No, no, Fräulein Sterzl: we are well wrapped up."

At this juncture Truyn's servant, who had been seeking them among the crowd, told them where the carriage was waiting.

While Zinka, wrapped in Nini's China-crape shawl, is borne along between the splashing fountains, across the bridge of St. Angelo, and through the empty, ill-lighted streets to the palazetto, all her pulses are dancing and throbbing — and the stars in the sky overhead seem unnaturally bright. It is the resurrection of her pain and with it of the lovely mocking vision of the joys she has lost. Good God! how vividly she remembers them all — how keenly! — the long dreamy afternoons on the Palatine, the delicious hours in the Corsini garden — under the plane-trees by the fountain, where he talked about Erzburg while the perfume of violets and lilies fanned her with their intoxicating breath; the sound of his voice — the touch of his light, thin hand, his smile — his way of saying particular words, of looking at her in particular moments. . .

She is walking with him once more in the Vatican, in rapt enjoyment of the beauty of the statues; the Belvedere fountain trickled and splashed in

dreamy monotony; golden sunbeams fleck the pavement like footmarks left by the Gods before they mounted their pedestals; there is a mysterious rustle and whisper in the lofty corridors as of far, far distant ghostly voices, — and then, suddenly, she is in front of Sant' Onofrio's; the air is thick with a pale mist. At her feet, veiled in the thin haze, indistinct and mirage-like, the very ghost of departed splendor, lies Rome — the vast reliquary of the world; Rome, on whose monuments and ruins every conceivable crime and every imaginable virtue have set their stamp; where the tragedies of antiquity cry out to the Sacrifice on Calvary.

They had stood together a long time looking down on it; then she had lost a little bunch of violets which she had been wearing and as she turned round to seek them she had perceived that he had picked them up and was holding them to his lips. Their eyes had met. . . .

Yes! he had loved her! he loved her still — he must — she knew it. She told herself that, impulsive and excitable as he was, the merest trifle would suffice to bring him back to her; but whether it was worth while to long so desperately for a man who could be turned by the slightest breath — that she did not ask herself.

And through all the torturing whirl of these memories, above the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the rattle of the wheels over the wretched pavement, she heard the cry "*miserere mei.*" But her thoughts turned no more to the God sacrificed for Man — the strongest angels' wings cannot bear us quite to heaven so long as our heart dwells on earth.

"Good-night," she said, kissing Gabrielle as the carriage drew up at the door of the palazetto.

"Will you let me have Nini's scarf for Gabrielle?" said Truyn. "I am afraid my little companion may catch cold."

"Oh! of course," cried Zinka, and she wrapped the child carefully in the shawl and kissed her again; "when shall I learn to think of anyone but myself?" she added vexed with herself.

Easter-Monday. All the bells in the churches of Rome are once more wagging their brazen tongues after their week of dumb mourning, and images of the Resurrection in every conceivable form — sugar, wax, soap — decorate all the shop windows.

Baroness Wolnitzka had returned fresher,

gayer and more enterprising than ever from her visit to Naples, where she not only had had herself photographed in a lyric attitude leaning on a pillar in the ruins of Pompeii, but, in spite of her huge size which was very much against her taking such excursions, she had with the help of two guides and a remarkably vigorous mule, reached the top of Vesuvius. Thanks, too, to a cardinal's nephew with whom she had scraped acquaintance on her journey, with a view to making him useful, she had succeeded in obtaining — not indeed a private audience of the pope — but leave to attend a private mass — and receive the communion, in company with three hundred other orthodox souls, from his sacred hand.

This morning she had been to the palazetto to take leave of her sister — to ask once more after Sempaly — to give a full and particular account of the service at the Vatican — and to deliver a discourse on the philosophical value of the mass. Slawa, whose orthodoxy had been fanned to bigotry, and who on Easter eve had duly climbed the *santa scala* on her knees, had supplemented her mother's narrative with a variety of interesting details:

"It was most exclusive, quite our own set, and few families of the Polish colony — I wore my

black satin dress beaded with jet and I heard a gentleman behind me say: 'That is the only woman whose veil is put on with any taste.'"

Sterzl had kept out of the way during their visit; Zinka had smiled amiably but had not attended; Baroness Clotilde had plied her sister with questions. Then the Wolnitzkas had left to go to the consecration of a bishop — also by invitation from the cardinal's nephew — the ladies were to be admitted to the sacristy and be presented with flowers and refreshments.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when General von Klinger was shown into the drawing-room of the palazetto. The room was not so pretty as it used to be; the furniture was all set out squarely against the walls by the symmetrical taste of the servants, and the flower vases that were always so gracefully arranged now never held anything but bunches of magnolias or violets; Zinka no longer cared to arrange them.

"I am so glad you happen to have come to-day," she cried as he came in. The brilliancy of her eyes and the redness of her lips showed that she was already suffering from that terrible spring fever which makes havoc with young creatures in the warm days of April and May. She was sitting by her brother on a low red sofa, as she had

so often sat with Sempaly; the baroness was lounging in an arm-chair fanning herself; there was a sort of triumphant solemnity in her manner. Even Cecil, too, was evidently in some excitement though his air was just as frank and natural as ever.

"Good evening, general, what hot, trying weather!" drawled the baroness. "It is an extraordinary event to find us all at home together at this hour but we all have a sacred horror of the mob in the streets on a holiday afternoon.

"Oh, mamma!" interrupted Zinka, "it is not only the crowd — we wanted to enjoy our good fortune together; did not we, Cecil?"

He nodded and stroked her hair. "Yes, little Zini."

"Only think, Uncle Klinger — you knew, of course, that Cecil's book on Persia had attracted a great deal of attention — but that is not all. He has been appointed *Chargé d'affaires* at Constantinople."

The general offered his congratulations and shook hands warmly with the young man.

"I could wish for nothing more exactly to my mind," said Cecil. "There is always something to do there; a man always has a chance of making his mark and getting on." He was sincerely

and frankly satisfied and affected no indifference to the distinction he had earned.

"In five years we shall see you ambassador," exclaimed the general, with the happy exaggeration that is irresistible on such occasions.

"We do not go quite so fast as that," laughed Sterzl. "However, I hope to rise in due time. Will not you be proud of me, Butterfly, when I am 'your excellency!'"

"I am proud of you already," said Zinka, "and you know how vain I am, and how much I value such things!"

It was the first time for some weeks that the general had seen the two so happy together and it rejoiced his heart.

"And the climate is good," Sterzl went on, "one of the best in Europe; the foreign colony is friendly and pleasant. You will enjoy studying oriental manners from a bird's-eye view, Zini; and the change of air will do you good?"

"You will take me too?" she said turning pale.

"Why, of course. The bay of Constantinople is lovely and we can often sail out on it; then, in the autumn, if I have time, we will make an excursion in Greece. You will be quite a travelled person." He put his finger under her chin and looked with tender anxiety into her thin face;

every trace of color had suddenly faded from it, and the light that her brother's success had kindled in her eyes had died out.

"It will be very nice—" she said wearily; "delightful — thank you, Cecil — you are always so kind. . . when are we to start?"

"You might get off in about a week; the sea-voyage will not over-tire you, and you can stop to rest at Athens. In the hot season we can go up to the hills—" then suddenly he glanced sharply in her face and his whole expression changed; he added roughly, with a scowl: "but you need not come unless you like — stay here if you choose — I do not want to force you."

At this instant the maid appeared to announce the arrival of a case from the railway.

"The new ball-dresses!" cried the baroness in great excitement. "I am thankful they have come in time. I was quite in despair for fear I should not have my new gown in time for the ball at the Brancaleone's. It would have seemed so uncourteous to the princess. . . Now let us see what Fanet has hit upon that is new. . ." And she rustled out of the room.

Zinka sat still, with a frozen smile, looking like a criminal to whom the day of execution had just been announced, and uneasily twisting her fingers.

"Of course, I like it, Cecil . . . how can you think . . . and on Wednesday week we can start— Wednesday will be best . . . now I must go and see what my new dress is like . . . do not laugh at me uncle; I must make myself look as nice as I can for my last appearance." And she hurried off; but on her way she stumbled against a table and a book fell to the ground. She stopped, picked the book up, turned over the leaves and laid it down; then, as if she wished to make up to her brother for some unkindness, she went back to Cecil and put her hand on his shoulder.

"I do really thank you very much," she said, "and I am glad — really and truly glad, and very proud of you. . . "

He looked up in her face and their eyes met— his lips quivered with rage — the rage of a lofty, generous, and masterful nature at finding itself incapable of making a woman dear to it happy.

Zinka shrank into herself. "My ball-dress!" she faintly exclaimed, and she slipped out of the room.

For a few minutes the two men were silent. Presently the general spoke:

"Zinka is going to the Brancaleones' to-morrow?"

"Yes," replied Sterzl; "at least, she has prom-

ised to go. Whether she will change her mind at the last moment and stay at home, of course I cannot foresee."

"But she really seems to care about it this time," said the general. "At least she took an interest in her dress."

"Her dress! . . . she did not even know what she was talking about. She fled that we might not see her tears. . . " Sterzl broke out, losing all his self-control. Then he looked sternly at his friend as though he thought he had betrayed a secret. But the old man's sad face reassured him. "It is of no use to try to act before you," he went on; "you are not blind — you must see how wretched she is — it is all over, general, she is utterly broken. . ." He started to his feet and after pacing the room two or three times stood still and with a helpless wave of the hands and a desperate shrug, he exclaimed: "There is nothing to be done — nothing!" Then he sat down again and buried his face in his hands.

Von Klinger cleared his throat, paused for a word and could find nothing better to say than: "In time — things will mend; you must have patience."

"Patience!" echoed Sterzl with an indescribable accent. "Patience! — yes, if I could only

hope that things would mend. At first it provoked me that she should let everybody see... know... I thought she might have more spirit and self-command. But now. — Good heavens! she does all she can and it is killing her... that is not her fault. If only she were resentful — but she never complains; she is always content with everything, she never even contradicts my mother now. And then, what is worst of all, I hear her at night — her room is over mine — walking up and down, very softly as if she were afraid of waking anyone — up and down for hours; and often I hear her sobbing — she never sheds a tear by day! . . ." he sighed. "And then — if it were for a man who was worth it all!" he went on. "But that blue-eyed, boneless, good-for-nothing simpleton! . . . I ought never to have allowed her to step out of her own sphere — I ought never to have allowed them to become intimate! I knew he was not worthy of her, even when, as I believed — but you will laugh at my simplicity perhaps — he condescended to be in earnest. — You cannot imagine what it is now to have to meet him every day, — to hear him ask every day: 'how are you all at home?' — I feel ready to choke . . . I could crush him under foot like a worm! . . . and I am bound to be civil.

I may not even tell him that he has insulted me."

The baroness here came back.

"Lovely!" she exclaimed, with her affected giggle, "quite perfect! Zinka has never had a dress that suited her so well."

"That is well!" said Sterzl vaguely, "where is she?"

"She is gone to lie down; she has a bad headache," minced the baroness. "The young girls of the present day have no stamina. Why, at her age I. . . ."

The general was not in the mood to listen to her sentimental reminiscences and he took his leave. In the hall he once more wrung Cecil's hand: "Fortune has favored you," he said; "you have a splendid career before you, and in her new and pleasant home Zinka will forget.—I congratulate you on your new start in life."

Aye — his new start in life!

CHAPTER II.

THE Brancaleone Palace, on the slope of the Quirinal, is one of the finest in Rome, and particularly famous for its gardens, laid out in terraces down the side of the hill, with the lower rooms of the palazzo opening on to the uppermost level. The dancing was in a large, almost square, room adjoining a long vaulted corridor full of old pictures relieved here and there by the cold severity of an antique marble statue. It was lighted by marvellous chandeliers of Venetian glass that hung from the ceiling. At the end of the corridor two steps led down into an anteroom, dividing it from a smaller sanctuary where the gems of the Brancaleone collection were displayed — mixed up, unfortunately, with several modern monstrosities — and from this room a door opened into the garden.

Zinka arrived late. A transient and feverish expectancy lent her pinched features the brilliancy they had lost while her timid reserve gave her even more charm than her former innocent self-confidence, and her dress was certainly wonderfully becoming. Nor had she lost all her old popular-

ity, for she was soon surrounded by a little crowd of Roman 'swells;' one or two even of the Jatinskas' admirers deserted to Zinka.

Truyn was not present; the cold his little girl had caught at St. Peter's had developed into a serious illness, and he could not leave her.

Zinka, with her gliding grace, her small head held a little high, and her softened glance, was still pretty to watch as she danced, and attracted general attention. The music, the splendor of the entertainment, the consciousness of looking well put her into unwonted spirits. She sent a searching glance round the room—no, he was not there. Sterzl stood talking with the general, delighted with her little triumph and charming appearance; then he was congratulated by several men of distinction on his recent promotion. He thanked them with characteristic simplicity and sincerity—the evening was a success for him too. Not long after midnight he left to attend to pressing business — matters were in a very unsettled state — and went to the embassy.

Within a short time Sempaly came in. He had spent the previous night, as was very generally known, at cards — this was a new form of dissipation for him—he had lost a great deal of money, and he looked worn and out of spirits. He did

not care for dancing and came so late to ask his handsome cousins for the cotillon that they were both engaged—a result to which he was so manifestly indifferent that Nini actually wiped away a secret tear. He was now standing with his fingers in his waistcoat pockets and his glass in his eye, exchanging impertinent comments with a number of other young men, on the figure of this woman or that girl, and trying to imagine himself in the position of the fabulous savage who found himself for the first time in a civilized ball-room.

Suddenly he was silent — something had arrested his attention.

The band was playing a waltz at that time very popular: "*Stringi mi*," by Tosti. The room was very hot; it was the moment when the curls of the young ladies begin to straighten, and their movements — at first a little prim — begin to gain in freedom; when there is an electrical tension in the air suggestive of possible storms and the most indifferent looker-on is aware of an obscure excitement. Crespigny and Zinka spun past him—Zinka pale and cool in the midst of the emotional stir around her. She was not living in the present — she was in a dream. Suddenly Crespigny, who was not a good dancer, stumbled against another couple, caught his foot in a lady's train and fell

with his partner. Sempaly pushed his way through the dancers with blind force and was the first to help Zinka to her feet. Without thinking for a moment of the hundred eyes that were fixed upon him he leaned over the young girl—her power over him had risen from the dead. She, bewildered by her fall, did not perhaps at first see who it was that had helped her to rise; she clung to his arm with half-shut eyes; then, as he whispered a few sympathizing words, she looked up, started, colored, and shrank from him.

"A very unpleasant accident," said some of the ladies.

Sempaly had taken possession of Zinka's slender hand and drew it with gentle insistence through his arm; then he led her out of the heated ball-room into the adjoining gallery.

The accident for which she had besieged Heaven with prayers had happened — the accident which threw him once more in her way. His old passion was awake again; she saw it — she could read it in his eyes. She summoned up all her self-command to conceal her happiness — not so much out of deliberate calculation as from genu-

ine timidity and womanly pride. He talked — saying all sorts of eager, sympathetic things — she asked only the coldest and simplest questions. He had fetched her a wrap and with the white shawl thrown around her he led her from one room to another among the fan-palms and creamy yellow statues. Now and then she spoke to some acquaintance whom they met wandering like themselves, but these were fewer and fewer. The supper-room was thrown open and every one was gone to the buffet.

Zinka's coldness, for which he was not at all prepared, provoked Sempaly greatly. He felt with sudden conviction that there could be no joy on earth to compare with that of once holding her in his arms and kissing her — devouring her with kisses. This image took entire possession of him and beyond the possible fulfilment of that dream he did not look. That joy must be his at any cost, if the whole world were to crumble at his feet.

"Zinka," he said in a low tone, "Zinka — Lent is over — Easter is come."

"Yes? what do you mean?" she said coldly, almost sternly.

"I mean," he said, and he looked her straight in the face, "that I have fasted and that now I will feast, and be happy."

They were in a small room — a sort of raised recess divided from the ball-room by a row of pillars; they were alone.

A joy so acute as to be almost pain came over Zinka. It blinded and stunned her; she did not speak, she did not smile, she did not even look up at him; she could not have stirred even if she had wished it — she was paralyzed. He thought she would not hear him.

"Zinka," he urged, "can you not forgive me for having jingled the fool's cap for six weeks till I could not hear the music of the spheres? Can you not forgive me — for the sake of the misery I have endured? I can bear it no longer — I confess and yield unconditionally — I cannot live without you. . . ."

Zinka was not strong enough to bear such emotion; the terrible tension to which for the last quarter of an hour her pride had compelled her gave way; she tottered, put out her hands, and was falling. He put his arm round her and with the other hand pushed open a glass door that led into the garden.

"Come out, the air will do you good," he said scarcely audibly, and they went out on to the deserted terrace. His arm clasped her more closely and drew her to him. Involuntarily he waited till

she should make some effort to free herself from his hold; but she was quite passive; she only raised a tear-bedewed face with a blissful gaze into his eyes, and whispered: "I ought not to forgive you so easily. . ." and then, with no more distrust or fear than a child clinging to its mother, she let her head fall on his shoulder and sobbed for happiness. A strange reverence came over him; the sound of some church bell came up from the city. He kissed her with solemn tenderness on the forehead and only said:

"My darling, my sacred treasure!" She was safe.

When the general came out of the card-room to look once more at the dancers before he withdrew, the cotillon, with its fanciful figures and lavish distribution of ribbons and flowers, was nearly over.

"What a cruel idea!" he heard in a lamentable voice from one of a row of chaperons, "to give a ball in such heat as this!"

It was the baroness, who was searching all round the room with her eye-glass and a very sour and puckered expression of face. Siegburg, who, as the general knew, was to have danced the cotillon with Zinka, was sitting out; when von Klinger asked him the reason he answered very

calmly, that "he believed Zinka had felt tired and had gone home." But the way in which he said it roused the old man's suspicions that he put forward this hypothesis to prevent any further search being made for Zinka. He had seen her last in the corridor with Sempaly, and he hurried off to find her. He sought in vain in all the nooks hidden by the plants; in vain in the recesses behind the pillars — but the door to the garden was open. This filled him with apprehension — he went out, sure that he must be following them.

The air was oppressively sultry and damp; it crushed him with a sense of hopeless anxiety. The scirocco had cast its baleful spell over Rome.

Northerners who have never been in Rome have no idea of the nature of the scirocco; they suppose it to be a storm of hot wind. No.... it is when the air is still and damp, when it distils but does not waft a heavy perfume that the scirocco diffuses its poison: a subtle influence compounded of the scent of flowers that it forces into life only to destroy them — of the mists from the Tiber whose yellow flood — like mud mixed with gold, which rolls over the corpses and treasure that lie buried in its depths — of the exhalations from the graves, and the perennial incense from all the churches of Rome. The scirocco cheats the soul

with delusive fancies and fills the heart with gloom and oppression; it inspires the imagination with dreams of splendid achievement and stretches the limbs on a couch in languor and exhaustion. It penetrates even the cool seclusion of the cloister and breathes on the pale cheek of the young nun who is struggling for devout aspiration, reminding her of long forgotten dreams.

All that is melancholy, all that is cruel and wicked in Rome — much, too, that is beautiful — is engendered by the scirocco. It is creative of glorious conceptions and of hideous deeds. One feels inclined to fancy that on the day when Caesar fell under the dagger of Brutus Scirocco and Tramontane fought their last fight for the mastery of Rome — and Scirocco won the day.

A dense grey cloud hung over the city and veiled the sinking moon. A cascade that tumbled from basin to basin, down the terraced slope of the Quirinal, plashed weirdly in the deep twilight of the earliest dawn, which was just beginning shyly to vie with the dying moon. Light and shade had ceased to exist; the whole scene presented the dim, smudged effect of a rubbed charcoal drawing.

The general sent a peering glance through the laurel-hedged alleys that led down the hill.

Above the clipped evergreens, rose huge ilexes, wreathed to the very top with ivy and climbing roses. Here and there something white gleamed dimly in the grey—he rushed to meet it—it was a statue or a white blossomed shrub. Roses and magnolias opened their blossoms to the solitude, and the scent of orange-flowers filled the heavy air, stronger than all the other perfumes of the morning. Now and then, like a faint sigh, a shiver ran through the leaves—the fall of a dying flower.

The old man held his breath to listen; he called: "Zinka—Sempaly!" No answer.

Suddenly he heard low voices in a path known as the alley of the Sarcophagus and thither he bent his steps. The sullen light fell through a gap in the leafy wall on Sempaly and Zinka, seated on a bench, hand in hand, and talking familiarly, forgetful of all the world besides.

Zinka was the first to see him; she was not in the least disconcerted.

"Oh! Uncle Klinger!" she exclaimed. "Mamma is waiting for me, I dare say!—but do not scold me, I entreat you—."

Thank God for those happy innocent eyes that looked so frankly into his!—On purity like hers

Scirocco could have no power! No—he could not be angry with her.—But *he!*

"Sempaly!" cried the old man indignantly: "What possesses you?"

"I have at length made up my mind to be happy," said Sempaly with feeling, and he raised Zinka's hand to his lips. "That is all."

"And I ought not to have forgiven him so easily—ought I?" murmured Zinka, quailing at the general's stern frown, and her head drooped.

"Zinka has been missed, you know how spiteful people are!" exclaimed von Klinger angrily, ignoring the sentimentality of the situation. Sempaly interrupted him with vehement irritation.

"What I should like to do," he said half to himself, "is to go straight back to the ball-room, and tell my most intimate friends at once of our engagement!" But even as he spoke he reconsidered the matter; "but I cannot," he went on, "unfortunately I cannot. I must even entreat you, Zinka, to keep it a secret even from your own household."

"Come, at once, with me," said the general drily, "my carriage is waiting in the Piazza. If I am not mistaken there is a little gate here which leads on to it. . . Yes, here it is. I will tell your

mother, so that others shall hear it, that you felt ill and left before the cotillon began and that Lady Julia took you home."

When Zinka was safely on her way to the palazetto in charge of the general's trusty old coachman, the two men looked each other in the face.

"Outrageous!" growled the general furiously. Sempaly turned upon him quickly:

"Think what you will of me," he said, "but do not let the shadow of a suspicion rest on Zinka. You know that if you hold up a cross to the devil himself, his power is quelled."

Without answering a word the general hurried past Sempaly and straight into the ball-room; but he found time to lock behind him the alcove door leading into the garden. In the ball-room he was met by the baroness who anxiously asked him:

"Where is Zinka? have you seen Zinka?"

"Zinka felt shaken and upset by her fall — she went away a long time since, with Lady Julia who took her home."

He spoke very distinctly and in French, so that several persons who were standing near might hear him. "She might have let me know," exclaimed the baroness peevishly.

"We looked for you, but could nowhere find

you," said the general. Never in his life before had he told a lie.

At some unearthly hour next morning he called on Lady Julia to confide to her the mystery of the night's adventure, that she might not contradict his story; as he had actually put Zinka into her carriage there seemed to be no other danger. Though she disliked the falsehood as much as he did, she was quite ready to confirm the fiction; at the same time she could not help saying again and again:

"Poor little thing! I hope it may all come right!"

CHAPTER III.

"DEAREST ZINKA, my own sweet little love,

"My brother arrived in Rome last night; he is on his way to Australia and I am thankful to say stays only a few days. So long as he is here I must make every sacrifice and hardly see you at all, for he must know nothing of our engagement. Now, shall I tell you the real sordid reason why I cannot speak to him of my happiness? — during these last few miserable weeks, simply and solely to kill the time, I have gambled and have always been unlucky, and I have got deeply into debt. My brother will pay, as he always has done, so long as the conditions remain unchanged. But... however, it is not a matter to write about. Believe this much only: that his narrow views can never affect my feelings towards you; though I may seem to yield, for I think it useless to provoke his antagonism. As soon as he has sailed there will be nothing in the way of our engagement and we will be married immediately. To an accomplished fact he must surrender. If I possibly can, I will see you this evening at the palazetto — just to

have one kiss and a loving word. Till then I can only implore you to keep this absolutely secret.

"Your perfectly devoted

"N. S."

This was the note that Zinka received the morning after the ball, as she was breakfasting alone in her own room, rather later than usual, but with a convalescent appetite. The color mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes flashed indignantly. Coldness and neglect she had borne — but the meanness and weakness — the moral cowardice — that this note betrayed, degraded him in her eyes till she almost scorned him. She felt as though a sudden glare had shown her the real Sempaly — as though the man she loved was not he, but some one else. The man she had loved was a lofty young god who had chosen to descend from his high estate to break the heart of an insignificant girl who ought to have thought herself happy only to have gazed upon him; but this was a boneless, nerveless mortal, who could stoop to petty subterfuge for fear of having to face the wrath of his brother.

She was furious; all the pride that had been crushed into silence by her dejection was roused to arms. She went to her desk and wrote as follows:

"I am prepared to marry you in defiance of your brother's will, but I could never think of becoming your wife behind his back. I am ready to defy him, but I do not choose to cheat him. It is of no use to come to the house this evening unless you are quite clear on this point. I could not think of marrying you unless I were perfectly sure that I was more indispensable to your happiness than your brother's good will. You must therefore consider yourself released from every tie, and regard the words you spoke yesterday in a moment of excitement as effaced from my memory. Ever yours,

"ZINKA STERZL."

Zinka enclosed this peremptory note in an envelope, addressed it, rang for her maid and desired her to have it sent immediately to the Palazzo di Venezia.

"And shall I say there is an answer?" asked the girl.

"No," said Zinka shortly.

No sooner had the maid gone on her errand than the hapless Zinka felt utterly wretched and almost repented of having written so indignantly... She might have said all that was in the note without expressing herself so bitterly. She thought the words over, knit her brows, shook her head—

and at that moment her eye fell on another letter which had been brought to her with Sempaly's, and which she had forgotten to open. She saw that the writing was Truyn's. She hastily read the note which was a short one.

"Dear Zinka: — My poor little girl has been much worse and the doctor gives me very little hope. She constantly asks for you, both when she is conscious and in her delirium. Come to her if you can. Your old friend,

"TRUYN."

"P. S. It is nothing catching — inflammation of the lungs."

Zinka started up — she forgot everything — her happiness, her grief, Sempaly himself — remembering only Truyn's indefatigable kindness and the sorrow that threatened him.

"Nothing catching. . . ." she repeated to herself: "poor man! he thinks of others even now — it is just like him. While I . . . I?" She colored deeply, for she recollected how that evening the child had sat shivering by her side and she had not noticed it.

"I had my head turned by a kind word from him. . . ." she thought vexed with her own folly.

In a very few minutes she was hurrying across

the Corso towards the Piazza di Spagna. Her maid had some difficulty in keeping up with her. Zinka almost flew, heeding nothing and looking at no one, till, in the Piazza di Spagna, she came upon a group of persons coming out of the Hotel de Londres and felt a light hand on her arm. Looking round she saw Nini.

"Good-morning. Where are you off to in such a hurry?" asked the young countess pleasantly.

"Good-morning," said Zinka hastily, "I am in a great hurry — I am going to the Hotel de l'Europe; Gabrielle Truyn is very ill — she wants to see me."

But at this moment Zinka perceived a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a very handsome face and haughty expression, standing close to Nini. He was gazing at her with perfectly well-bred admiration, and Nini introduced him as Prince Sempaly. Then she saw that Nicklas Sempaly was just behind, with Polyxena. His eyes met hers with a passionate flash, but he only bowed with distant formality. Zinka had no time to think about his manner, she was hardly conscious of his presence — all she felt was that she was being detained.

"You must excuse me," she said, smiling an

apology to Nini and shaking hands warmly with her without stopping to think of the formalities of caste. "Poor Count Truyn is expecting me." And she hurried on again.

"Who is that sweet-looking girl, Nini?" asked the prince, "for, of course, you omitted to mention her name."

"Fräulein Sterzl," replied Nini, "the sister of one of the secretaries to the embassy."

"Sterzl," repeated the prince somewhat flatly.

"Zenaïde Sterzl!" said Polyxena over her shoulder.

But the ironical accent emphasis she laid on the odd mixture of the romantic and the commonplace was thrown away upon Prince Sempaly, who was much too fine a gentleman to laugh at his inferiors; all he said was:

"Sterzl? I seem to know the name. Sterzl—I served for a time under a Colonel Sterzl of the Uhlans. He was a very superior man."

Zinka meanwhile was flying on to the Hotel de l'Europe. In the sun-flooded court-yard stood two rose-trees, a white and a red — two brown curly-headed little boys were fighting a duel with walking-sticks in a shady corner—two English families were packing themselves into roomy landaus for an excursion and sending the servants in and out to

fetch things that they had forgotten. The air was full of the scent of roses, and sunshine, and laughter; but one of the Englishwomen hushed her companion who had laughed rather loudly and pointing up to one of the windows said: "Remember the sick child."

A cold chill fell on Zinka's heart — she ran up the familiar stairs. In Truyn's drawing-room sat Gabrielle's English governess — anxious but helpless.

"May I go in?" asked Zinka.

"No, wait a minute — the doctor is there." At this moment Truyn came out of the child's room with Dr. E —— the German physician, and conducted him down-stairs. Truyn had the fixed, calm, white face of a man who is accustomed to bear his sorrows alone.

When he returned he went up to Zinka and took her hand: "She asks for you constantly," he said, "but do you think you can prevent her seeing that you are unhappy and alarmed?"

"Yes — indeed you may trust me," said Zinka bravely, wiping away her tears; and she went into the child's room "as silent and bright as a sunbeam."

CHAPTER IV.

SOME one must have seen Zinka and Sempaly in the course of their moonlight walk or else have found out something about it in spite of the general's precautions; this was made evident by an article which came out on the Friday after the ball in a French 'society paper' published weekly in Rome. The title of the article was "a moonlight cotillon;" it began with an exact description of Zinka, of whom it spoke as Fräulein Z . . . a S . . . . l, the sister of a secretary in the Austrian Embassy; referred to the sensation produced by her appearance as Lady Jane Grey, spoke of her as an elegant adventuress — "a professional beauty" — and hinted at her various unsuccessful schemes for winning a princely coronet; schemes which had culminated in a moonlight walk, a few nights since, during a ball at the house of a distinguished member of Roman society, and which had outdone in audacity all that had ever been known to the *chronique scandaleuse* of Rome. "Will she earn her reward in the form of a coronet and will the pages of "High Life" ere long an-

nounce a fashionable marriage in which this young lady will fill a part? — that is the question," so the article ended.

"High Life," — this was the name of the paper graced by this effusion — was scouted, abused and condemned by everybody, covertly maintained by several, and read by most — with disgust and indignation it is true, but still read. On this fateful Friday every copy of "High Life" was sold in no time, and before the sun had set Zinka's name was in every mouth.

What said the world of Rome? Lady Julia cried, had some tea, and went to bed; Mr. Ellis said "shocking!" assured his wife that he was convinced of Zinka's innocence, and that it would certainly triumph over calumny; after which he quietly went about his business and spent two whole hours in practising a difficult passage on the concertina.

It was the Brauers — the Sterzls' old neighbors before mentioned — who contributed chiefly to the diffusion of the article, supplementing it with their own comments. They had some acquaintance among the "cream" of Rome, though they had not been invited to the ball at the Brancaleone palace. Frau Brauer assumed a tone of perfidious compassion: it was a terrible

affair for a young girl's reputation, though, for her part, she could see nothing extraordinary in a moonlight wandering with an intimate friend. Her husband, to whom the Sterzl family had paid very little attention — the baroness out of conceit, and Cecil and Zinka because he was in fact intolerably affected, pompous and patronizing — said with a sneering smile that he had never seen anything to admire in that little adventuress, with her free and easy innocence — pushing herself into society she was not born to. He had always thought it most unbecoming; and it must be a pleasant thing indeed for the Duchess of Brancaleone to have such a scandalous business take place in her house — she would be more careful for the future whom she invited!

Madame de Gandry and Mrs. Ferguson thought the article very amusingly written — not that they would ever have said a word about such a piece of imprudence — for really no one was safe! To be sure any evil that might be written against them would be a lie — a pure invention — which in Zinka's case was quite unnecessary . . . So they sent the paper round to all their friends as a warning against rushing into acquaintance with strangers: "One cannot be too careful." Zinka had seemed to them suspicious from

the first, for after all she was not "the real thing."

All these spiteful and cruel insinuations they even ventured to utter in the presence of Princess Vulpini, in the general's atelier, the spot where all that circle concentrated whenever anything had occurred to excite or startle it, and they made the princess furious.

"I am an Austrian myself," she said, "and was brought up with ideas of exclusiveness which are as much above suspicion as they are beyond your comprehension. I am strictly conservative in all my views. But Zinka is elect by nature — an exceptional creature before whom all such laws give way. I should have regarded it as pure folly to sacrifice the pleasure of her acquaintance for the sake of a social dogma."

"Exceptions always fare badly," murmured the general.

Countess Ilsenbergh, who was as strict on points of honor as she was on matters of etiquette, was deeply aggrieved by the article; she expressed herself briefly but strongly on the subject of the freedom of the press, and confessed that, whether Zinka were innocent or guilty, things looked very ugly for Sempaly.

The count rushed into eloquence giving an

exhaustive discourse on the whole social question.

"Princess Vulpini is quite right," he said. "Fräulein Sterzl is a bewitching creature, quite an exception — and if any departure from traditional law is ever permissible it would be so in her case. But the general too is right; exceptions must always fare badly in the world, and we cannot endanger the very essence and being of social stability in order to improve the position of any single individual. Above all, we must never create a precedent." And he proceeded to enlarge on the horrible consequences which must result from such a mixture of classes, referred to the example of France, and proposed the introduction of the Hindoo system of caste, in its strictest application, as a further bulwark for the protection of society in Europe and the coercion of ambitious spirits. His wife, at this juncture, objected that European society had not yet reached such a summit of absolute exclusiveness as he would assume, and that, consequently what was immediately needed was not any such far-reaching scheme for its protection, but some plan for dealing with the disagreeable circumstances in which its imperfection had at this time placed them.

He replied that the matter lay in a nutshell;

either the story in 'High Life' was a lie, in which case Sempaly had nothing to do but to deny it categorically, to prove an alibi at the hour mentioned and to horsewhip the editor — or, the facts stated were true, and then — under the circumstances — there was nothing for it — but . . . the lady's previous character was quite above suspicion — there was nothing for it — but. . ." and he shrugged his shoulders.

"But to make Fräulein Sterzl Countess Sempaly!" cried Madame de Gandry. "Well, I must say I do think it rather too much to give an adventurous little chit a coronet as a reward for sheer impudence. But I beg your pardon, general,—I had forgotten that you are a friend of the family."

"And I," exclaimed the general beside himself, and quite pale with rage, "I, madame, was within an ace of forgetting that I was listening to a lady!"

Princess Vulpini interposed: "You yourself said, madame, that you had always avoided any acquaintance with Zinka; now I have known her intimately, and seen her almost every day; I have observed her demeanor with men — with young men — and heard her conversation with other girls, and I can assure you that the word impudence is no more applicable to her conduct than

to that of my little girl of three. — And if she did, in fact, go into the garden with my cousin the night of the ball, it is a proof simply of romantic thoughtlessness, of such perfect, unsuspicious innocence that it ought of itself avail to protect her against slander. I spent last night with Zinka, by the bedside of my little niece who is ill, and no girl with a stain on her conscience could look so sweetly pure or smile with such childlike sincerity. I would put my hand in the fire for her spotless innocence!"

The princess spoke with such dignity and warmth, and while she spoke she fixed such a scathing eye on Madame de Gandry, that the Frenchwoman, abashed in spite of herself, could only mutter some incoherent answer and withdraw with Mrs. Ferguson in her wake.

The four Austrians were alone.

"The person who puzzles me in this business," said the princess, "is Nicki Sempaly. As soon as this wretched paper came into my hands I sent it to his rooms. There I heard that he had just gone out with the Jatinskys. I went to the Hotel de l'Europe to talk it over with my brother, but he had gone to lie down and I had not the heart to wake him. Besides, he could have done no good, and I could not bear to disturb his happi-

ness over his child's amendment. — So I came to unburden my heart to you, general."

"Sempaly cannot have seen it yet," suggested Ilsenbergh. The princess shrugged her shoulders. Countess Ilsenbergh once more expressed her opinion that "it was a very unpleasant affair and that she had foreseen it all from the first," after which, finding that it would be difficult to prevent her husband from delivering another lecture, she rose to go.

At this instant Prince Vulpini came into the studio with a beaming countenance. "Ah! here you are! I saw the carriage at the door as I was passing. — Have you heard the latest news?"

"Sempaly is engaged to Zinka?" cried his wife.

"No!" cried the prince; "the wind last night tore down the national flag on the Quirinal. Hurrah for the Tramontana!"

A few minutes later the general was alone; after a moment's hesitation he took up his hat and hurried off to the palazetto to see how matters stood there. He was one of those who had been the latest to hear of the slanderous article and at

the same time to be the most deeply wounded by it. But perhaps by this time Sempaly had engaged himself to Zinka, he said to himself, and he hastened his pace.

It was the baroness's day at home. The silly woman was sitting dressed and displayed — a grey glove on one hand, while with the other she pretended to arrange a dish of bonbons.

"How kind of you! —" she exclaimed as the general entered the room. The stereotyped formula came piping out of her thin lips without the smallest variation to every fresh visitor, as chilling and as colorless as snow.

He had hardly greeted the baroness when he looked round for Zinka — at first without seeing her; it was not till a bright voice exclaimed:

"Here I am, uncle, come and give me a kiss," that he discovered her, in the darkest corner of the room, leaning back in a deep arm-chair and looking rather tired and sleepy but wonderfully pretty and unwontedly happy.

"I am so tired, so tired! — you cannot think how tired I am," she said, laying his hand coaxingly against her cheek, "and mamma is so cruel as to insist on my staying in the drawing-room because it is her day at home, and I was sound asleep when you came in, for thank heaven! we

have had no visitors yet. I sat with Gabrielle all last night and the night before without closing my eyes; but then I was so glad to think that the little pet would not take her medicine from anyone but me; and last night, at length, in the middle of one of my stories, she fell asleep on my shoulder. But then in order not to disturb her I sat quite still for six hours. I felt as if I had been nailed to a cross — and to-day I am so stiff I can hardly move." And she stretched her arms and curled herself into her chair again with a pretty caressing action of her shoulders. "You ought to have stayed in bed," said the general paternally. "Oh dear no! why I slept on till quite late in the morning. Besides, my being tired is of no real importance; the great point is that Gabrielle is out of danger. Oh, if anything had happened to her! . . . " and she shuddered; "I cannot bear to think of it. Count Truyn is firmly convinced that I have contributed in some mysterious way to the child's amendment, and when I came away this morning he kissed my hands in gratitude as if I had been the holy *Bambino* himself. I laughed and cried both at once, and now I am so happy — my heart feels as light as one of those air balls the children carry tied by a string, that they may not fly off up to the clouds. But why do you look so

grave? are you not as glad as I am, uncle that. . . "

The baroness who had been looking at her watch here expressed her surprise that not a living soul had come near them to-day.

"You are evidently not a living soul, uncle — nothing but my dear grumpy old friend," said Zinka with her pathetic little laugh. There was something peculiarly caressing and touching about her to-day; the old man's eyes were moist and his heart bled for the sweet child.

Outside the door they heard a heavy swift step — the step of a man in pressing but crushing trouble; the door was torn open and Sterzl, breathless, green rather than pale, foaming with rage, stormed in — a newspaper in his hand.

"What is the matter — what has happened?" cried Zinka dismayed. He came straight up to her and stared at her with dreadful eyes.

"Were you really in the garden with Sempaly during the cotillon?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes," she said trembling.

He gave a little start and shuddered — tottered — then he pulled himself up and flung the newspaper at her feet — at hers — his butterfly, his darling!

"Read that," he said.

Von Klinger tried to seize the paper, but Sterzl held him with a firm hand. "Your leniency is out of place," he said dully; "*she* may read anything."

Zinka read; suddenly she sprang up with a cry of horror and the paper fell out of her hand. Even now she did not understand the matter,—exactly what she was accused of she did not know; only that it was something unwomanly and disgraceful.

"Cecil!" she began, looking into his face, "Cecil. . ." and then she covered her face, which from white had turned crimson, with her hands. He meanwhile had felt the absolute innocence of the girl, and was repenting of his rash and cruel wrath.

"Zini," he cried, "forgive me — I was mad with rage — mad." And he tried to put his arm round her. But she held him off.

"Leave me, leave me," she said. "No, I cannot forgive you. Oh Cecil! if all the newspapers in the world had said you had cheated, for instance — do you think I should have believed them?"

He bent his head before her with a certain reverence: "But this is different, Zini," he said very gently; "I do not say it as an excuse for

myself, but it is different. You do not see how different because you are a child — an angel — poor, sweet, little butterfly," and he drew her strongly to his breast and laid his lips on the golden head; she however would not surrender and insisted on freeing herself.

"What on earth is going on?" the baroness asked again, for the twentieth time. Getting, even now, no reply, she picked up the newspaper that was lying on the floor, caught sight of the article, read a few lines of it, and broke out into railing complaints of Zinka — enumerating all the sins of which Zinka had been guilty from her earliest years and particularly within her recent memory, and ending with the words: "And you will ruin Cecil yet in his career."

"Be quiet, mother;" said Cecil sternly. "My career is not the present question — we must think of our honor and of her happiness," and leaning over the fragile and trembling form of his sister, he said imploringly:

"Tell me, Zini, exactly what happened."

She had freed herself from his clasp and was standing before him with her arms folded across — rigid though tremulous — and her voice was cold and monotonous as she obeyed him and gave with naïve exactitude her short and simple report,

blushing as she spoke. When she had ended Cecil drew a deep breath.

"And since that you have heard nothing of Sempaly?" he asked.

"The next morning he sent me a note."

"Zinka, do not be angry with me . . . show me that note."

She left the room and soon returned with the letter which she handed to Sterzl. He read it through with great gravity and marked attention then knitting his brows he slowly folded it up and turned it over.

"And you answered him?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"Very little — that I was quite prepared to marry him without his brother's consent, but behind his brother's back? — No!"

In the midst of his trouble a flash of pride lighted up Sterzl's weary eyes. "Bravo, Zini!" he murmured, "and he took this answer in silence?"

Zinka paused to think:

"Yes. . ." she said; "but no. — He sent me a note to the Hotel de l'Europe."

"And what does he say in that?"

"I have not read it yet; it came just at the

moment when Gabrielle was at the worst and then I forgot it — but here it is. . ." and she drew it out of the pocket of her blue serge dress. Sterzl shook his head and glanced with a puzzled air at his sister; then he opened the note. It was as follows:

"My darling little treasure, my haughty indignant little sweetheart:

"Immediately on the receipt of your note I rushed to see you. The porter told me that you were not at home but with your poor little friend Gabrielle. Of course I cannot think of intruding on you there, though I would this day give a few years of my life for a sight of you — for one kiss. Sooner than lose you I am ready to throw up everything. Command and I obey . . . but no, I must be wise for us both; I must wait till my affairs are somewhat in order. There is no help for it — I can only ask your forgiveness. I kiss your hands and the hem of your garment — I am utterly unworthy of you, but I love you beyond words.

"SEMPALY."

When Sterzl had read this highly characteristic letter he slowly paced the room two or three times, and finally stood still in front of his sister.

Then, taking her hand and kissing it fondly, he said:

"Forgive me, Zini — I am really proud of you. You have behaved like an angel . . . but he — he is a contemptible sneak."

But this she could not stand. "I do not defend him," she exclaimed vehemently, "but at any rate he loves me, and he understands me.— He, at any rate, would never have suspected me. . . and . . . and. . ." But it was in vain that she paused for a word — she could say nothing more in his favor; but she called up all her pride, and holding her head very high she left the room; as soon as she was outside they could hear her sob convulsively.

The baroness rose to follow her, but Cecil stood in her way.

"Where are you going?" he asked sternly.

"To Zinka; I really must make her see what mischief she has done. It is outrageous . . . why, at thirteen I should have known better!" Sterzl smiled bitterly:

"Very likely," he said, "but I must beg you to leave Zinka to herself; she is miserable enough without that."

"And are we to submit to her heedlessness

without even reproving her for it ?" said the baroness indignantly.

"Yes, mother," he said decidedly; "our business now is not to reprove her, but to protect and comfort her."

At this juncture dinner was announced. Sterzl begged the general to remain and dine with them, for he had, he said, several things to talk over with him. He evidently wished above everything to avoid being alone with his mother. Before sitting down he went to Zinka's room to see whether she would not eat at least a little soup; but he came back much distressed.

"She would hardly speak to me," he said; "she is quite beside herself." And he himself sat in silence, eating nothing, drinking little, crumbling his bread and playing with his napkin. Each time the door opened he looked anxiously round.

The meal was short and uncomfortable; when they had returned to the drawing-room and were drinking their coffee the servant brought Sterzl a letter. Cecil took it hastily, looked at the address, and, not recognizing the writing, at last opened it. It contained only a half-sheet of note-paper, with a cleverly sketched caricature: Sterzl himself as auctioneer, the hammer in one hand a doll in the other, and before him the coroneted heads of

Rome. Sterzl at once recognized the likeness, though his lank figure was absurdly exaggerated, and his whole appearance made as grotesque as possible. He only shrugged his shoulders and said indifferently:

"Does any one really think that such a thing as this can hurt or vex me now? Look, general — Sempaly, no doubt, is the ingenious artist of this masterpiece."

The general took the paper, and would have torn it across to prevent Sterzl from examining it any further; but before he could do so Cecil, looking over his shoulder, had snatched it out of his hand.

"There is something written on it!" he said, deciphering the scribble in one corner, in Sempaly's weak, illegible hand-writing: "Mademoiselle Sterzl, going — going — gone —! . . . Ah! I understand!"

His face grew purple and he breathed with difficulty.

"To send you this is contemptible," cried the general; "Sempaly drew this before he had ever seen Zinka . . . I know it, I was present at the time."

"What difference does that make?" said Sterzl; "if this is the view people took of me and my pro-

ceedings! Well, and after all they were right — I should have liked to see my sister brilliantly married — I meant it well . . . and I have made myself ridiculous and have been the ruin of the poor child."

His rage and misery were beyond control; he walked up and down, then suddenly stood still, looking out of the open window; then again he paced the room.

"Sempaly is incomprehensible," he began, "quite incomprehensible! I had no very high opinion of his character — particularly lately; but I could not have supposed him capable of such baseness and cruelty. What do you gather from his not coming here to-day?"

"He simply has not happened to see the paper," the general suggested. "He is gone on some expedition with his brother and his cousins."

"Well, but even supposing that he has not read this article," said Sterzl, "it still is very strange that, as matters stand between him and Zinka, he should have let two days go by without making any attempt to see her."

The general was silent.

"You know him better than I do," Cecil began again presently, "and, as Zinka tells me, you were

present during some part of this romantic moonlight promenade. Do you think he seriously intends to marry her?"

"I know that he is madly in love with her, and even the Ilsenberghs, who were discussing the matter at my house with the Princess Vulpini, saw no alternative for him — irrespective of his attachment to her — but to make her an offer."

"We shall see," murmured Sterzl. He looked at the clock: "half past nine!" he exclaimed. "This is becoming quite mysterious. I will try once more to see him at his rooms; his chasseur will perhaps know when he is expected to return home. Would you mind remaining here?" he added in a low voice; "keep my mother from going to Zinka; the poor child cannot bear it;" and he hurried off.

In about half an hour he returned.

"Well?" asked the general.

"He set out at one o'clock for Frascati, with the prince, the Jatinskys, and Siegburg," said Sterzl gloomily. "When I asked whether he was to be back this evening the man said certainly, for he was to set off to-morrow morning with his excellency the ambassador. He has been afraid to declare his engagement for fear of a scene with his brother — he is gone out of Rome for fear of

a scene with me — 'High Life' was lying open on his writing-table."

They heard the light rustle of a dress. Sterzl looked round — behind him stood Zinka with tumbled hair and anxious, eager, tear-dimmed eyes.

"Zinka!" he cried, stepping forward to catch her; for her gaze was fixed, she staggered, put out her hands with a helpless gesture and fell into his arms. He laid her head tenderly on his shoulder and carried her away.

CHAPTER V.

SEMPALY'S nervous system was very sensitive and his ear remarkably delicate; he had in consequence a horror—a perfect mania of aversion—for any scene which might involve excitement and loud talking. Besides this he had the peculiarity—common enough with the spoilt children of fortune—of always ignoring as far as possible the inevitable difficulties of life in the hope that some *deus ex machina* would interfere to set matters straight for him.

His passion for Zinka was perfectly genuine, at once vehement and tender; far from diminishing, it had, if possible, increased during these last three days. Though that hour of sentimental and guileless talk with Zinka under the midnight moon had for the time satisfied her, it had only fevered him; and while his cowardly double-dealing had lowered him in her esteem, her straightforward pride had raised her infinitely in his. He was utterly miserable, but this did not prevent him from allowing his good-natured senior to pay his enormous debts, nor—in order to propitiate him—from paying

specious attentions to his cousins. It must, however, be said in extenuation, that this flirtation was not so much deliberate as instinctive, for he was a man whose untutored and unbounded impulse to make himself agreeable led him irresistibly to do his utmost to produce a pleasant impression, even at the sacrifice of his honor. If, only once, during these three days, he had had an opportunity of speaking to Zinka all might perhaps have turned out differently. He would probably have found it easy, with his wonderful fascination of person, to recover the ground he had lost; and her proud rectitude might possibly have influenced him to take a bolder course of action. But, in the first instance, he could not intrude on Zinka while she was sitting by her little friend Gabrielle, and the idea of rushing into an explanation with Sterzl did not smile on his fancy.

Thus he let the hours slip by, till, on the Friday morning, the luckless copy of 'High Life' was brought into him addressed in a feigned hand. This made him furious, and he was on the point of rushing off to the palazetto when he remembered that he had promised to be ready to join the party to Frascati at one o'clock. He had dipped his pen and prepared the paper to send an excuse to the Hotel de Londres when there was a knock, and

Prince Sempaly, with his two cousins, walked in, half an hour before the appointed time.

"What a surprise! . . . An unexpected honor!" he exclaimed somewhat disconcerted.

"That is what we intended," said Polyxena laughing. "Hum! there is a rather pronounced perfume of latakia in your room — but the whole effect is pretty, very pretty," while Nini looked timidly about her with her fawn-like eyes. A bachelor's quarters are, as is well known, one of the most interesting mysteries that ever exercise the curious imagination of a young lady.

"The girls insisted on seeing your den," the prince explained, "so I had to bring them, whether or no, while Siegburg amuses their mamma."

"Why, you yourself proposed it, Oscar!" cried Nini.

Sempaly bowed. "From this time henceforth this room is consecrated ground," he said gallantly — and "High Life" was lying on his desk all the time and an iron fist seemed clenched upon his heart. If his brother had but come alone . . . but with these two girls . . . it was crucial.

Xena began to touch and examine all his odds and ends, to open his books, and at last to hover round his writing-table where, with graceful impertinence, she was about to take up the fatal sheet.

"Stop, stop!" cried Nicki, "that is not for your eyes, Xena."

"Look, but touch not," said the prince, with a good-natured laugh; "young maidens like you are not permitted to inspect the secrets of a bachelor's rooms too closely. You might seize a scorpion before we could interfere. Besides, we must not keep your mother waiting any longer, children; make haste and get ready, Nicki."

For a moment Sempaly tried to think of an excuse; then he reflected that it really was not worth while to spoil the pleasure of Oscar's last day — all might be set right afterwards. So he only asked for time to write a note, and scribbled a few lines to Sterzl in which he formally proposed for Zinka. This note he confided to a porter desiring him to carry it at once to the secretary's office.

After this he was for a time very much pleased with himself; but, as the afternoon wore on, the more uneasy he became, and it was to this unrest that most of the tender glances were due that the prince cast alternately on him and on Nini. He felt more and more as if he were being driven into a trap; in the Villa Aldobrandini he found an issue from some of his difficulties. Suddenly, as they were standing by the great fountain, Nini and

he found themselves *tête-a-tête*, a circumstance arising from the consentaneous willingness of the rest of the party to give them such an opportunity. He seized the propitious moment to disburden his soul. He addressed her as his sister, confessed his secret betrothal, and implored her kind interest for Zinka. Nini, who felt as though she had been stabbed to the heart, was brave as became her and for sheer dread of betraying her own feelings, she tried to take a pleasure she was far from feeling in the success of his love affair. He kissed her hand and kept near her for the rest of the day. His brother, who perceived that the young couple had come to an understanding, communicated his observations to Countess Jatinska with extreme satisfaction. He was himself a man of strong and lofty feeling, free from all duplicity, and he could not conceive that a young man could have anything to say to a very handsome girl in private but to make love to her.

The day was at an end. With that want of precaution of which only foreigners in Rome can be guilty, they set out homewards much too late and did not reach the hotel before ten. Here Nemesis overtook Sempaly. At the end of supper, which the little party had served to them in the countess' private sitting-room, and at which

the confidential footing on which Sempaly stood with regard to his cousin was thrown into greater relief, the prince, with a frank smile of self-satisfaction at his powers of divination, raised his glass and said: "To the health of the happy couple."

Nini turned crimson; Nicki turned pale. He was in the trap now. Brought to bay he could do nothing but turn upon the foe whom he could not evade. He was possessed by a wild impulse to snatch the odious mask from his own face.

"And who are the happy couple?" he asked.

"You need not be so mysterious about it, Nicki," cried his brother warmly. "Of you and. . . " but a glance at Nini reduced him to silence.

"Of me and Fräulein Zinka Sterzl," said Sempaly with vehement emphasis.

The blood flew to the prince's head; rage and horror fairly deprived him of speech. Countess Jatinska laughed awkwardly, Polyxena pursed her lips disdainfully while Nini gave her cousin her hand and said loyally:

"Your bride shall always find a friend in me."

But now the prince's wrath broke loose — he was furious; he swore that this insane marriage should never take place, and could not conceive how his brother — a man old enough to know

better—could have allowed such a piece of madcap folly to enter his head.

The ladies rose and withdrew; Sempaly, who till within a few minutes had been so weak and vacillating, had suddenly become rigid in obstinacy and he desired the waiter to bring him the fateful number of 'High Life'. The prince read it, but his first observation was: "Well! and a pretty state the world would soon come to if every man who lets a charming adventuress entrap him into an indiscretion were to pay for it by marrying her!"

At this insulting epithet applied to Zinka, Sempaly fired up. He did not attempt to screen himself, he defended Zinka as against himself, with the most unsparing self-accusation. Egotistical, sensitive, and morally effete as he was, he was still a gentleman, and he now set no limits to his self-indictment; it seemed as though he thought that by heaping invective on his own head he could expiate the baseness into which he had been betrayed during the last few days. He told the whole story: that he had loved Zinka from the first time of seeing her: that he had been on the point of making her an offer when an accidental interruption had suddenly snatched him from the heaven of hope and bliss: that he had neglected and forsaken her: that his constant intimacy with his

handsome cousins had raised a barrier between him and Zinka; then, how he had met her that night at the Brancaleones', and how, as he helped her to rise after her tumble, his passion had taken entire possession of him — all this he told, down to the moment when she had laid her head on his shoulder. "And before such guileless trust what man is there that would not bow in reverence!" he ended, "all Rome can bear witness to her sweetness and goodness; ask whom you will — Marie Vulpini, Truyn, even the Ilsenberghs — or Siegburg here."

The prince turned to Siegburg.

"I can make neither head nor tail of the matter," he said. "Is all he says of this girl true, or mere raving?"

Siegburg's answer was simple, eager, and plain; it is, at all times, a difficult thing for a young man to praise a girl without reflecting on her in any way, but Siegburg's testimony in Zinka's favor was a little masterpiece of genuine and respectful enthusiasm. Prince Sempaly's face grew darker as he spoke.

"And the young lady in question is the girl we met the other day in the Piazzi?" he said.

"Yes."

"The sister of the secretary of legation whom

the ambassador introduced to me yesterday, and the niece of my old colonel?"

"Yes."

"And from what you tell me not only an absolutely blameless creature, but universally beloved?"

"Yes."

For a minute the prince was silent. Every fibre of his being had its root in the traditions of the caste into which he had been born, and a connection between Zinka Sterzl and a Sempaly was to him simply monstrous. He had in the highest degree a respect for his past — "le respect des ruines" — but they must be grand ruins, of a noble past, or they did not touch him at all. With his head resting on his hand he sat silent by the supper-table, which was not yet cleared and where the lights sparkled in the half-empty champagne-glasses, and the flowers placed for the ladies still lay by their plates. Suddenly he looked up, and pointing to the newspaper, he asked:

"Had you seen that article when we came to fetch you from your rooms this morning?"

"Yes."

The prince sat bolt upright.

"And you did not stay in Rome to defend the girl?" His black eyes looked straight into his

brother's blue ones. "You came with us? You left this young lady to be, for the whole day, the victim of the slander of all the evil tongues of Rome, for fear of an unpleasant explanation — for fear of a few high words with me?—You have behaved in a base and unmanly way throughout this affair, both to this young lady and to the poor sweet creature in there. . ." and he pointed to the door behind which the two young countesses disappeared with their mother. "Of course I shall not let you starve; your allowance shall be paid to you regularly as heretofore — but beyond that we have no further connection; we have nothing in common, you and I. Go!"

The *deus ex machina* had failed to appear. The dreaded scene with his brother had been postponed for a few hours, but it had come at last and Sempaly had gained nothing by his procrastination and duplicity. He had provoked not merely his brother's anger but his scorn as well, while his marriage with Zinka, when he had at last found himself compelled to announce it to his brother, had altogether lost its startling and interesting aspect as a chivalrous romance, and had

come down to a mere act of reparation to satisfy his conscience.

Sempaly rose rather earlier than usual next morning, his nerves still conscious of the remembrance of this unsatisfactory scene and of the sleepless night that had been the consequence. Vexed with himself; at once surprised and touched by his brother's lofty indignation; ashamed to think of the calumny to which his irresolution and his absence must have exposed Zinka — he was in that state of sensitive irritability in which a man holds all the world in some degree responsible for his own shortcomings, and is ready to revenge himself on the first man he meets for the misery he is enduring.

While he was waiting for his breakfast, walking up and down the sitting-room — half drawing-room, half smoking-room — the general came in. For the first time in his life Sempaly greeted the old man as an intruder.

"Good-morning," he cried, "what procures me the honor of such an early visit?"

"Well," said Von Klinger hotly, "it can scarcely surprise you that I, as Zinka's god-father and oldest friend, should come to ask you what you mean by your extraordinary conduct."

"That, it seems to me, is her brother's business," said Sempaly roughly.

"It is on purpose to prevent a collision between you and Sterzl that I have come so early," replied the general, who was cut out for an officer of dragoons rather than for a diplomatist. "Sterzl is beside himself with fury, and I know that your intentions with regard to Zinka are perfectly honorable, and so. . ."

But at this moment the general's eye fell on a travelling-bag that the luxurious young attaché was wont to carry with him on short journeys, and which lay packed on the divan. "You are going away?" asked the old man surprised.

"I had intended to accompany my brother as far as Ostia to-day and return early to-morrow; but that is at an end — the prince and I have quarrelled — yes, I have quarrelled past all possibility of a reconciliation with my noble and generous brother. Are you satisfied?" and he stamped with rage.

"And is the want of judgment that has led to your parting any fault of mine pray?" exclaimed the general angrily.

There was a hasty rap at the door; on Sempaly's answering: "come in," Sterzl walked in. He did not take Sempaly's offered hand but drew a

newspaper out of his pocket, held it out in front of Sempaly, and asked abruptly:

"Have you read this article?'

"Yes," said Sempaly from between his teeth.

"Yesterday — before you went out?" Sterzl went on.

This word-for-word repetition of the prince's question touched all Sempaly's most painful and shameful recollections of the scene to the quick. His eyes flashed, but he said nothing.

Sterzl could contain himself no longer. All the bitter feelings of the last six weeks seethed in his blood, and the luckless travelling-bag caught his eye. This was too much. .

What happened next? . . .

The general saw it all in a flash of time — unexpected, and inevitable.

Sterzl took one stride forward and struck Sempaly in the face with the newspaper. At the same moment Sempaly's servant came in with the breakfast tray.

A few minutes later Sterzl and the general went down the stairs of the embassy in silence, not even looking at each other. When they were outside the younger man stopped and drew a deep breath:

"Sempaly will send you his seconds in the

course of the morning," he said; "I must ask you to act for me."

The general nodded but did not speak.

"I will send word to Crespigny too, and then you can do whatever you think proper."

Still the general said nothing, and his silence irritated Sterzl.

"I could bear it no longer," he muttered as if in delirium; "what . . . do you suppose . . . too much. . ."

By this time they were in the Corso. Towards them came Siegburg, as bright and gay as ever, his hat pushed back on his head.

"I am happy to be the first to congratulate you, Sterzl," he cried.

"On what pray?" said Sterzl fiercely.

"On your sister's engagement to Sempaly — what! then you really did know nothing about it?"

Sterzl was bewildered: "What is it — what are you talking about? — I do not understand," he stammered.

"What, have you not heard?" Siegburg began; "the bomb fell last evening; Nicki declared his engagement. Oscar, to whom the whole business was news . . . come into this café and I will tell you exactly all about it; it does not do to discuss such things in the street."

"I — I have not time," muttered Sterzl with a fixed vacant stare; and, as he spoke, he shot past Siegburg; but his gait was unsteady and he ran up against a passer-by.

"What on earth ails him?" said Siegburg looking after him. "I thought he would be pleased and — well! the ways of man are past finding out. This marriage will create a sensation in Vienna, eh, general? But I approve — I entirely approve. We are on the threshold of a new era, as Schiller — or some one has said, Bismarck very likely — and we shall live to tell our children how we stood by and looked on. But what is the matter with you both — you and Sterzl? To be sure—you were coming from the Palazzo di Venezia — have Nicki and Sterzl quarrelled — a challenge!" The general nodded. "But it can be amicably arranged now," said Siegburg consolingly.

CHAPTER VI.

ON his return home Sterzl found Sempaly's note of the day before. The porter had taken it, as he was ordered, to the secretary's office, but as Sterzl had not gone there all day it had lain unopened; till, this morning, one of the messengers had thought it well to bring it to the palazetto. Sterzl read it and hid his face in his hands.

Within a short time Sempaly's seconds were announced — Siegburg and a military attaché from the Russian embassy.

No, it could not be amicably arranged — under the circumstances there was but one way of satisfying the point of honor. This point of honor — what is it? A social dogma of the man of the world, and the whole creed of the southern aristocrat.

Sterzl was to start that night by the eleven o'clock train for Vienna, on matters of business, before setting out for Constantinople. The affair must therefore be settled at once. Beyond fixing the hour Sterzl left everything to his seconds. Swords,

at seven that evening, among the ruins opposite the tomb of the Metellas was finally agreed on.

Soon after six, Sterzl and his seconds set out. The carriage bore them swiftly along, through the gloomy, stuffy streets which lead to the Forum, along the foot of the Palatine, and past the Colosseum, through the arch of Constantine into the Via Appia, on and on, between grey moss-grown walls, over which they caught glimpses of ruins and tall dark cypresses. Then the walls disappeared and bushy green hedge-rows, covered with creepers, bordered the road, and presently the Campagna lay before them, an endless, rolling, green carpet, with its attractive melancholy, and the poisonous beauty of orchids and asphodels with which each returning spring decks its waste monotony, like a wilderness in a fevered dream.

Sterzl sat in silence on the back seat, facing his two friends. He did not even pretend to be cheerful. A brave man may sometimes face death with indifference, but hardly with a light heart. Death is a great king to whom we must need do homage. His soul was heavy; but his two companions, who knew not only his staunch nature but all the circumstances of the duel, knew that it was not from anxiety as to his own fate. He could not forget that this catastrophe was, at last, due

solely and entirely to his own violence and loss of self-command. He never once reflected that this engagement—brought about by a series of make-shifts and accidents — could hardly have resulted in a happy marriage; he had forgotten Sempaly's sins and remembered one thing only: that his sister might have had the moon she had longed for, and that he alone had snatched it from her grasp.

A powerful fragrance filled the air, coming up from the orchids, from the blossoming hedges, from the fresh greenery of the gardens, like the very soul of the spring, bringing a thousand memories to his brooding brain and aching heart. It reminded him of the great untended orchard at home, and of one morning in the last May he had spent there before going to school. The apple-trees were clothed with rosy blossom; butterflies were flitting through the air, and the first forget-me-nots peeped bluely among the trailing brambles on the brink of the brook that danced across the garden, murmuring sleepily to the shadowy, whispering alders. There was a fragrance of the soil, of the trees, of the flowers — just as there was now — and Zinka, then a mere baby, had come tripping to meet him and had said with her little confidential and important air:

"I do believe that God must have set the

gates of heaven open for once, there is such a good smell." He could see her now, in her white pinafore and long golden hair, clinging to her big brother with her soft, weak little hands. And he had lifted her up and said: "Yes, God left the door open and you slipped out my little cherub." With what large, wondering eyes she had looked into his face.

She had always been his particular pet; his father had given her into his special charge and now . . . "poor, sweet butterfly!" he said to himself, half audibly.

"Do not be too strict in your fence," said a deep voice close to him. It was Crespigny who thus startled him from his dream of the past:— "Do not be too scientific. You have everything in your favor — practice, skill, and strength; but Sempaly — I know his sword-play well — has one dangerous peculiarity: you never know what he will be at." Sterzl looked over his shoulder. The tomb of Cecilia Metella was standing before them.

Opposite the tomb of Cecilia Metella is a deserted and half-ruined early Gothic structure, a singular mixed character of heathen grandeur and

of mediæval strength, lonely and roofless under the blue sky. A weather-beaten cross, let into the crumbling stone-work above the door-way, betokens it a sanctuary of the primitive Christian times; on entering we see a still uninjured apse where the altar table once stood. No ornament of any kind, not even a scrap of bas-relief, is to be seen; nothing but frail ferns — light plumes of maiden hair that deck the old walls with their emerald fronds. The floor is smooth and covered with fine turf, from which, in spring-time, white and red daisies smile up at the sky, and dead nettles grow from every chink and along the foot of the walls.

The other party were already on the spot; Sempaly was talking unconcernedly, but with no affectation of levity, to the Russian, and bowed politely to the three men as they came in. His manner and conduct were admirable; in spite of his irritable nervousness, there were moments when he had — and in the highest degree — that unshaken steadfastness which is part of the discipline of a man of the world, to whom it is a matter of course that under certain circumstances he must fight, just as under certain others he must take off his hat.

Siegburg changed color a good deal; the

others were quite cool. They made a careful survey lest some intruding listener should be within hearing, but all was still as death. The vineyard behind the little chapel was deserted.

The formalities were soon got through; Sempaly and Sterzl took off their coats and waistcoats, and took the places assigned to them by their seconds.

The signal was given. — The word of command was heard in the silence and, immediately after, the first click of the swords as they engaged.

Any one who has lived through the prolonged anticipation of a known peril or ordeal, knows that, when the decisive moment has arrived, the tension of the nerves suddenly relaxes; anxiety seems lifted from the soul, fear vanishes and all that remains is a sort of breathless curiosity. This was the case with the general and Siegburg; they watched the sword-play attentively, but almost calmly. Sempaly was the first to attack, and was extraordinarily nimble. Sterzl stood strictly on the defensive. He fenced in the German fashion, giving force to his lunge with the whole weight of his body; and this, with his skill and care, gave him a marked advantage over his lighter adversary. The sense of superior strength seemed at first to

hinder his freedom; in fact, the contest, from a mere technical point of view, was remarkably interesting. Sempaly displayed a marvellous and — as Crespigny had said—quite irresponsible suppleness, which had no effect against Sterzl's imperturbable coolness. It was evident that he hoped to weary out his antagonist and then to end the duel by wounding him slightly. He had pricked Sempaly just under the arm, but Sempaly would not be satisfied; it was nothing he said, and after a short pause they began again.

Sempaly was beginning to look pale and exhausted, his feints were short, straight, and violent; Sterzl, on the contrary, looked fresher. Like every accomplished swordsman, in the course of a long fight he had warmed to his work and was fighting as he would have done with the foils, without duly calculating the strength of his play; things looked ill for Sempaly.

Suddenly, through the silence, a song was heard in the distance, in a boy's thin piping soprano:

> "Bright May — the sweetest month of Spring;
> The trees and fields with flowers are strown —"

It sent a thrill through Sterzl's veins, reminding him of the evening when Zinka had sung

those words to Sempaly. The romantic element that was so strong in him surged to his brain; he lost his head; fearing to wound Sempaly mortally, he forgot to cover himself and for a second he suddenly stood as awkward and exposed as though he had never had a sword in his hand.

The seconds rushed forward — too late.

With the scarcely audible sound that the sharp steel makes as it pierces the flesh, Sempaly's sword ran into his adversary's side. Sterzl's flannel shirt was dyed with blood — his eyes glazed — he staggered forward a step or two — then he fell senseless. The duel was over.

A quarter of an hour later and the wound had been bound up as best it might, and in the closed landau, which they had made as comfortable as they could by arranging the cushions so as to form a couch — the general supporting the groaning man's head on his arm, and opposite to him the surgeon — they were driving homewards slowly — slowly.

Dusk had fallen on the Campagna, from time to time the general looked out anxiously to see how far they were still from Rome. The road was

emptier and more deserted every minute; a cart rattled past them full of peasants, shouting and singing at the top of their voices; then they met a few white-robed monks, wending their way with flaring torches to some church; and then the road was perfectly empty. The cypresses stood up tall and black against the dull-hued sky and the wide plain was one stretch of grey.

At last the arch of Constantine bends over them for a minute and the horses hoofs clatter on the stones — slowly — slowly. . The lamps of Rome twinkle in the distance — they have reached the Corso, at this hour almost empty of vehicles but crowded with idlers, and the cafés are brilliantly lighted up. The slowly-moving landau excites attention, the gapers crowd into knots, and stare and whisper. At last they reach the palazetto, turn into the court-yard and get out. The porter comes out of his den, his dog at his heels barking loudly.

"Hush, silence!" says the general — the servants come rushing down, the women begin to sob and cry, and again the general says:

"Hush, hush!" as if it were worth while to keep Zinka in ignorance for a minute more or less.

With some difficulty the heavy man is lifted

out and carried up-stairs — the heavy shuffling steps sound loud in the silence. Suddenly they hear Zinka's voice loud in terror, then the baroness's in harsh reproof — a door is flung open and Zinka rushes out to meet them—a half-smothered cry of anguish breaks from her very heart — the cry with which we wake from a hideous dream.

They carried him into his room, and while they carefully settled him in bed the servant announced Dr. E . . . , the famous German physician of whom mention has already been made. Sempaly, who had driven back at full speed and had reached Rome more than an hour sooner than the general with the wounded man, had sent him at once. Dr. E . . . examined the patient with the greatest care, adjusted the bandage with admirable skill, wrote a prescription, and ordered the application of ice. He gave a sympathetic hand to each of the ladies, who were standing anxiously at the door as he left the room, and reassured them with an encouraging smile; promising them, with that kindly hopefulness to which he owed half his fashionable practice, that the wounded man would pass a quiet night.

But when he was face to face with the general, who escorted him down stairs, the smile vanished.

"The wound is dangerous?" asked the old man

with a trembling heart. The surgeon shook his head.

"Are you a relation?" he asked.

"No, but a very old friend."

"It is mortal," said Dr. E . . . "I may be mistaken — of course, I may be wrong . . . nature sometimes works miracles and the patient has a splendid physique. What fine limbs! I have rarely seen so powerful a man — but so far as human science can foresee . . ." and he left the death-warrant unspoken. "It is always a comfort to the survivors to know that all that can be done has been done; I will come early to-morrow morning to enquire. Send the prescription to the French chemist's — it is the best. Good-night." And he got into the carriage that was waiting for him.

The general gave the prescription to the porter, who, with the readiness and simplicity that are so characteristic of the Italians, rushed off at once without his hat. As if there were really any hurry! . . .

The old soldier, composing himself by an effort, returned to the bedroom. Zinka was standing very humbly at the foot of the bed, pale and tearless, but trembling from head to foot. The baroness was pacing the room and sobbing violently, wring-

ing her hands and pushing her hair back from her temples. Of course she flew at the general with questions as to the surgeon's prognosis. His evasive answers were enough to fill her with unreasonable hope and to revive the worldly instincts which her terrors had for a moment cast into the background.

"Yes, yes, he will pass a quiet night," she whimpered; "he will get well again — it would have been too bad with such a brilliant career before him — but this is an end to Constantinople. . ."

Zinka, on the contrary, had turned still paler at the general's report but she said nothing.

That there had been a duel she and her mother had of course understood. What did she infer from that? What did she think — what did she feel? She herself never rightly knew; in her soul all was dark — in her heart all was cold. Her whole being was concentrated in horror.

After much and urgent persuasion the general succeeded in inducing the baroness to leave the room and to lie down for a time, "to spare herself for her son's sake."

She had hardly closed the door when the servant came quietly in and said that Count Truyn had come. Zinka looked up.

"Shall I let him come in?" asked the general. Zinka nodded.

Siegburg had told him, and though it was now eleven Truyn had hurried off to the palazetto. He came into the room without speaking and straight up to Zinka. The simple feeling with which he took her hands in both his, the deep and tender sorrow at being unable to help or to reassure her that spoke in his eyes comforted and warmed her heart; the frozen horror that had held her in its clasp seemed to thaw; tears started to her eyes, a tremulous sob died on her lips; then, controlling herself with great difficulty, she murmured intelligibly: "There is no hope — no hope!"

His mother's loud lamèntations had not roused the wounded man but the first sound from Zinka recalled him to consciousness; he began to move uneasily and opened his sunken eyes. The whites shone dimly, like polished silver, as he fixed them on his sister's face; from thence they wandered to a blood-stained handkerchief that had been forgotten, and then to the general. Slowly and painfully he seemed to comprehend the situation. He struggled for breath, with an impatient movement of his hands and shoulders, and then shivered as with a spasm. He was conscious now, and sighed deeply.

The first thing that occurred to him was his official duty:

"Have you sent word to the ambassador?" he asked the general almost angrily.

"No, not yet."

"Then make haste, pray; they must telegraph to Vienna."

"Yes, yes," said Von Klinger soothingly, "I will see to it at once. Would you be good enough to stay till I return?" he added to Truyn and he hurried away.

For a few minutes not a word was spoken, then Sterzl began:

"Do you know how it all happened, Count?" Truyn bowed. "And you, Zini?" asked Cecil, looking sadly at the girl's white face. "I know that you are suffering — that is all I want to know," she replied.

"Oh! Zini. . ." Sterzl struggled for breath and held out his hand to Zinka, then he went on in a hoarse and hardly audible voice: "Zini . . . Butterfly . . . it was all my doing . . . I have spoilt your life . . . I did it. . ."

She tried to stop him: "You must not excite yourself," she said, leaning over him tenderly; "forget all that till you are better — I know that you have always loved me and that you would

have fetched the stars from heaven for me if you could have reached them."

He shuddered convulsively: "No, Zini, no. . . you might have had the stars," he said in a panting staccato; "the finest stars. Sempaly was not to blame . . . only I . . . the prince had agreed . . . but I . . . I forgot myself . . . and I spoilt it all . . . oh, a drink of water, Zini, please! . . ."

She gave him the water and he drank it greedily; but when she gently tried to stop his mouth with her hand he pushed it away, and went on eagerly, though with a fast failing voice: "No . . . I must tell you . . . it is a weight upon my soul. There, in my desk . . . Count . . . in the little pocket on the left . . . there is a letter for Zinka.— Give it her. . ."

Truyn did his bidding. The letter was sealed and addressed to Zinka in Cecil's fine firm hand. She opened it; it contained the note that Sempaly had written before starting for Frascati and Sterzl had added a few words of explanation in case it should not fall into Zinka's hands till after his death.

She read it all while the dying man anxiously watched her face, but her expression did not alter by a shade. Sempaly's words glided over her heart without touching it; even when she had

read both notes she did not speak. Two red flames burnt in her pale cheeks.

"I got . . . the note . . . too late," said Sterzl sadly, "the general . . . can tell you how . . . how it all happened . . . I lost my head . . . but he . . . he is safe, so you must forgive me . . . and do . . . act . . . as if I had never existed . . . then . . . I shall rest . . . in peace . . . and be happy in . . . my grave . . . if I know . . . that you are . . . happy."

Still she did not speak; her eyes were strangely overcast; but it was not with grief for her lost happiness. Suddenly she tore the note across and dropped the pieces on the floor.

"If he had written ten letters," she cried, "it would have made no difference now; do not let that worry you, Cecil — it is all at an end. Even if there were no gulf between us I could never be his wife! I have ceased to love him. — How mean he is in my eyes — compared with you!"

And so the brother and sister were at one again; the discord was resolved.

For more than four and twenty hours Cecil wrestled with death and Zinka never left his side. The certainty of their mutual and complete devotion was a melancholy consolation in the midst of this cruel parting. The pain he suffered was agoniz-

ing; particularly during the night and the early morning; but he bore it with superb fortitude and it was only by the nervous clenching of his hands and the involuntary distortion of his features that he betrayed his suffering. He hardly for a moment slept; he refused the opiate sent by the surgeon; he wished to "keep his head" as long as possible.

When Zinka—with a thousand tender circumlocutions — suggested to him that he should receive the last sacraments of the Church he agreed. "If it will be any comfort to you, Butterfly," he sighed; and he received the priest with reverent composure.

In the afternoon he was easier — Zinka began to hope.

"You are better," she whispered imploringly, "you are better, are you not?"

"I am in less pain," he said, and then she began making plans for the future — he smiled sadly.

No man could die with a better grace, and yet it was hard to die.

The catastrophe had roused universal sympathy. The terrible news had spread like wildfire through the city and a sort of panic fell on the rank and fashion of Rome. No one, that day, who had ever spoken a spiteful or a flippant word against

Sterzl or his sister, failed to feel a prick of remorse. Every one came or sent to the palazetto to enquire for them. Now and again the baroness would come in triumphantly, in her hand a particularly distinguished visiting-card with its corner turned down, and rustle up to the bedside: "Ilsenbergh came himself to the door to ask after you!"

Late in the day he fell into an uneasy sleep; Zinka and the general did not quit the room. The window was open but the air that blew in through the Venetian blinds was damp and sultry. The street was strewn with straw; the roll of the carriages in the Corso came, dulled by distance, up to the chamber of death. Then twilight fell and the rumbling echoes were still. Presently, the slow irregular tramp of a crowd broke the silence, with the accompaniment of a solemn but dismal chant. Zinka sprang up to close the window; but she was not quick enough. The sleeper had opened his weary eyes and was listening —: "A funeral!" he muttered.

After this he could not rest, and his sufferings began once more. He tossed on his pillow, talked of his will, begging the general to make a note of certain trifling alterations; and when Zinka entreated him not to torment himself but to think of that by-and-bye, he shook his head, and mur-

mured in a voice that was hoarse and tremulous with pain: "No, I am in a hurry . . . time presses . . . railway fever . . . railway fever . . ."

When Zinka, unable to control herself, was leaving the room to hide her tears, he desired her to remain:

"Only stop by me . . . do not leave me, Zini," he said. "Cry if it is a relief to you . . . but stay here . . . poor little Butterfly! . . . yes, you will miss me. . ."

Once only did he lose his self-command. It was late in the evening. He had begged them to send to the embassy for an English newspaper which would give some information as to a certain political matter in which he was particularly interested; the ambassador himself brought it to his bedside.

"How are you?. . . how are you now?" he asked with sincere emotion . . . "You were quite right, Sterzl. Ignatiev has done exactly as you said; you have a wonderful power of divination . . . I shall miss you desperately when you go to Constantinople. . ." and his excellency fairly broke down.

There was a painful pause. "I am going further than Constantinople. . ." Sterzl murmured at length. "I should like to know who will get my

place . . ." His voice failed him and he groaned as he hid his face in the pillow.

The end came at midnight. Dr. E . . . had warned the general that it would be terrible; but it was in vain that they tried to persuade Zinka to leave the room. The whole night through she knelt by the dying man's bed in her tumbled white dressing-gown — praying.

At about five in the morning his moaning ceased. Was all over? No, he spoke again; a strange, far-away look, peculiar to the dying, came into his eyes. "Do not cry, little one — it will all come right..." and then he felt about with his hands as if he were seeking for something — for some idea that had escaped him. He gazed at his sister. "Go to bed, Zini — I am better . . . sleepy . . . Constanti. . ." He turned his head to the wall and breathed deeply. He had started on his journey.

The general closed his eyes and drew Zinka away. Outside in the corridor stood a crushed and miserable man — it was Sempaly. Pale, wretched, and restless, he had stolen into the palazetto, and as he stood aside his hands trembled, his eyes were haggard. She did not shrink from him as she went by — she did not see him!

A glorious morning shone on the little garden-court. In a darkly-shady corner a swarm of blue

butterflies were fluttering over the grass like atoms fallen from the sky. It was the corner in which the Amazon stood.

CHAPTER VII.

THANKS to Siegburg's always judicious indiscretion all Rome knew ere long that Prince Sempaly had consented to Zinka's marriage with his brother the evening before the duel, and at the same time it heard of Sterzl's burst of anger and its fearful expiation. Princess Vulpini's unwavering friendship, which during these few days she took every opportunity of displaying, silenced evil tongues and saved Zinka's good name. Now, indeed, there was a general and powerful revulsion of feeling in Sterzl's favor. It suddenly became absurd, petty, in the very worst taste, to doubt Zinka — Zinka and Cecil had always been exceptional natures . . .

Sterzl had expressed a wish to be buried at home; the body was embalmed and laid in a large empty room, where, once upon a time, the

baroness had wanted to give a ball. There were flowers against the wall, and on the floor. The bier was covered with them; it was a complete Roman *Infiorata*. The windows were darkened with hangings and the dim ruddy light of dozens of wax-tapers filled the room. Countess Ilsenbergh and the Jatinskys came to this lying in state; distinguished company, in ceremonial black, crowded round the coffin. Never had the baroness had so full a 'day' and her sentimental graces showed that, even under these grim circumstances, she felt this as a satisfaction. She stood by the bier in flowing robes loaded with crape, a black-bordered handkerchief in her hand, and a tear on each cheek, and — received her visitors. They pressed her hand and made sympathetic speeches and she murmured feebly: "You are so good — it is so comforting."

Having spoken to the mother, they turned to look for the sister; every one longed to express, or at least to show, their sincere sympathy for her dreadful sorrow. But she was not in the crowd— not to be seen, till a lady whispered: "There she is," and in a dark recess, Princess Vulpini was discovered with a quivering, sobbing creature, as pale as death and drowned in tears; but no one ventured to intrude on her grief. No one but Nini,

who looked almost as miserable as Zinka herself, and who went up to her, and put her arms round her, and kissed her.

Next day mass was performed in the chapel of San-Marco, adjoining the embassy, and a quartette of voices sang the same pathetic allegretto from the seventh symphony that had been played, hardly three months since, for the 'Lady Jane Grey' tableau.

A week later the Sterzls quitted Rome. Up to the very last the baroness was receiving visits of condolence, and to the very last she repeated her monotonous formula of lament:

"And on the threshold of such a splendid career!"

Zinka was never in the drawing-room, and very few ventured to go to her little boudoir. Wasted to a shadow, with sunken, cried-out eyes and pinched features, it was heart-rending to see her; and after the first violence of her grief was spent she seemed even more inconsolable. It is so with deep natures. Our first sorrow over the dead is always mixed with a certain rebellion against fate — it is a paroxysm in which we forget everything — even the cause of our passionate tears. It is not till we have dried our eyes and our heart has raged itself into weariness — not till we have at

last said to ourselves: "submit," that we can measure the awful gap that death has torn in our life, or know how empty and cold and silent the world has become.

Every day made Zinka feel more deeply what it was that she had lost. She was always feeling for the strong arm which had so tenderly supported her. The general and Princess Vulpini did everything in their power to help her through this trying phase, but the person with whom she felt most at her ease was Truyn; and very often, after seven in the evening, when she was sure of meeting no one, she stole off to visit Gabrielle; it was touching to see how the little girl understood the trouble of her older friend, and how sweetly she would caress and pet her.

On the morning of their departure Truyn and the general saw them off from the station. After the ladies were in the carriage Truyn got in too, to open or close the windows and blinds; when he had done this Zinka put out her hand:

"God bless you, for all your kindness," she said, and as she spoke she put up her face to give him a kiss.

For an instant he hesitated then he signed her forehead with a cross, and bending down touched her hair with his lips.

"*Au revoir*," he murmured in a half-choked voice, he bowed to the baroness and jumped out. As he watched the train leave the station his face was crimson and his eyes sparkled strangely; and he stood bareheaded to catch the last glimpse of a pale little face at the window.

"If only I had the right to care for her and protect her," he muttered.

CHAPTER VIII.

AND now to conclude.

Baroness Sterzl was one of those happily rare natures who have not one redeeming point. In her Moravian estate, whither they now retired, she was sick of her life, and treated Zinka with affectionate austerity. Bored and embittered, she was always bewailing herself and made every one miserable by her sour mien and doleful appearance. When the year of mourning was ended she began to crave for some excitement; she made excursions to watering places, and to Vienna, where she gathered round her the fragmentary remains of her old circle of acquaintance and tried to astonish them by magnificent reminiscences of her sojourn in Rome. At the same time she still wore deep furbelows of crape, and wrote her invitations on black-edged paper; she talked incessantly of her broken mother's-heart wearing, as it were, a sort of Niobe nimbus; while, in fact, her display of mourning was nothing more than a last foothold for her vanity. General von Klinger

always declared that at the bottom of her heart she was very proud of her son having been run through by a Sempaly.

She died, about three years after the catastrophe, of bronchitis, which only proved fatal because, though she already had a severe cold, nothing could dissuade her from going on a keen April morning to see the ceremony of washing the beggars feet at the Burg, with a friend from the convent of the Sacred Heart.

Zinka felt the loss of her mother more deeply than could have been expected. Year after year she spent summer and winter in her country house, where Gabrielle Truyn, with her English governess, sometimes passed a few weeks with her — her only visitors. Truyn very rarely went to see her, and never stayed more than a few hours; and the sacrifice it was to him to lend his little companion for those visits can only be appreciated by those who have understood how completely his life was bound up in hers.

With Princess Vulpini Zinka kept up an affectionate correspondence. Very, very, slowly did her grief fade into the background; but — as is always the case with a noble nature — it elevated and strengthened her. She gave up her whole time to acts of kindness and benevolence; the only

pleasure in which, for years, she could find any real comfort was alleviating the woes of others.

Not long after the death of the baroness, General von Klinger left Europe to travel, and did not return till the following spring twelvemonths. He disembarked at Havre and proceeded to Paris, where he proposed spending a few days to see the Salon before going home. By the obliging intervention of a friend he was admitted to the "*vernis sage*" — varnishing day, or, more properly, the private view — the day before the galleries were opened to the public. Among the little crowd of fashionable ladies who had gained admittance by the good offices of a drawing-master or an artist friend, he observed a remarkably pretty young girl who, with her nose in the air, was skipping from one picture to another with a light and vigorous step, and pronouncing judgment on the works exhibited with the inexorable severity and innocent conceit of a fanatical novice. This fair young critic was so thoroughly aristocratic in her bearing, there was something so engaging in her girlish arrogance, so like a spoilt child in her confidential chat with her companion — an elderly

man, and one of the best known artists of Paris—that the old soldier-painter could not help watching her with kindly interest. Presently she happened to see him; scrutinized him for a moment, and came to meet him with gay familiarity.

"Why, General! are you back at last? How glad papa will be — and you have not altered in the very least!. . ."

"I cannot say the same of you, Countess Gabrielle," he replied.

"Well, of course. We last met four years ago at Zini's I think, . . ." she chattered on. "Then I was a child, and now I am grown up; and I will tell you something, General, I have exhibited a picture — quite a small water color drawing," and she blushed, which made her look like her father, "you will come and look at it will you not?"

"Of course," he declared; and then, glancing at her dress: "You are in mourning?" he said hesitatingly.

"Yes," she replied, "in half mourning now — for poor mamma; it is nearly a year since she died. . ." and a shade crossed her face — "ah, there is papa!" she exclaimed, suddenly brightening, "we are always losing each other — our tastes are different — papa is old fashioned you know — quite behind the times . . ."

Truyn greeted the general very heartily; Gabrielle stood looking from one to the other; little roguish dimples played in her cheeks, and at last she stood on tiptoe and whispered something to her father. At first he seemed doubtful, and it was not without a shade of embarrassment that he said:

"We are going on to the Hotel Bristol, where we are to breakfast with my sister. It will, I am sure, give her the greatest pleasure if you will join her party."

The general made some excuses — it was an intrusion, and so forth — but he allowed himself to be persuaded and drove off with them through the flowery and well-watered alleys of the Champs Elysées to the hotel in the Place Vendôme.

"Aunt Marie," said Gabrielle as she danced into the room, "guess who is here with us!"

"Ah, General!" said the princess warmly, "you are the right man in the right place."

But another figure caught his eye—a little way behind his hostess stood Zinka. The sorrow she had experienced had stamped its lines indelibly on her face; still, there was in her eyes a light of calm and assured happiness that blended very sweetly with the traces of past grief. The bright May-morning of her life had been brief and it

was past, but there was so tender a charm in her face and manner that even Gabrielle, with the radiance of eighteen, could not vie with her.

Truyn went up to her and there was an awkward silence. Then Gabrielle began to laugh heartily.

"And cannot you guess, General?" she exclaimed.

"It is not yet announced to the world," Truyn stammered out, "but you have always taken such a kind interest. . ." and he took Zinka's hand. The old man's face beamed — he positively hugged Zinka and shook hands vehemently with Truyn.

But Zinka burst into tears —: "Oh, uncle," she said, "if only Cecil were here!"

And Sempaly?

After the catastrophe he vanished from the scene — went to the East, and there again came to the surface. A Sempaly may do anything. He is now considered one of our most brilliant diplomatists.

But he has gone through a singular change; from a dandified, frivolous attaché he became a hard-and-fast official. He looks if possible more

distinguished than ever and his features are more sharply cut. He is irritable, arrogant and ruthless; never sparing man or woman the biting sarcasms that dwell on the tip of his tongue, and yet, still— nay, more than ever — he exercises an almost irresistible spell over all who come in contact with him.

One day, when the general was waiting at some frontier station in Hungary for a train to Vienna, he was struck by the full rich voice of a traveller in a seal-skin coat, with a fur cap pulled down over his brows, who was giving peremptory orders to his servant. The old man looked round and his eyes met those of the stranger — it was Sempaly, also on his way to Vienna, from the East. They spoke — exchanging a few commonplace remarks, but without any cordiality. Presently Sempaly began with the abruptness for which his name was a by-word:

"You have just come from Paris. You were present at the wedding? What do you think of Truyn's marriage?"

"I am delighted at it," said the general.

"Well, everybody seems satisfied. Marie Vulpini is enchanted, and Gabrielle pleaded for her papa — so I hear. — So everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds!" he added in

his sharp, hasty tones — "and Zinka — how is she looking? The papers said she was lovely."

"She is still very charming," said the general, with the facile garrulity of old age, "and happiness always beautifies a woman — she had but one regret: that Cecil had not lived to see it."

He was suddenly conscious of his stupendous want of tact; so, to put the conversation on neutral ground, he eagerly began to compliment Sempaly on the wonderful rapidity of his advancement, remarking that it must afford him great satisfaction to have so fitting a sphere for the exercise of his peculiar talents.

Sempaly looked at him keenly, and shrugging his shoulders, with a singular smile, he said:

"It is a strange thing, General — when we are young we claim happiness at the hands of Destiny, as if it were our right; as we grow older we humbly sue, only for peace, as an alms. — We get what we demand more easily than what we beg for — but it slips through our fingers."

THE END.

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PRUSIAS.—A Romance of Ancient Rome under the Republic, by **Ernst Eckstein,** from the German by Clara Bell. Authorized edition. In two vols. Paper, $1.00. Cloth, $1.75.

"The date of 'Prusias' is the latter half of the first century B. C. Rome is waging her tedious war with Mithridates. There are also risings in Spain, and the home army is badly depleted. Prusias comes to Capua as a learned Armenian, the tutor of a noble pupil in one of the aristocratic households. Each member of this circle is distinct. Some of the most splendid traits of human nature develop among these grand statesmen and their dignified wives, mothers, and daughters. The ideal Roman maiden is Psyche; but she has a trace of Greek blood and of the native gentleness. Of a more interesting type is Fannia, who might, minus her slaves and stola, pass for a modern and saucy New York beauty. Her wit, spirit, selfishness, and impulsive magnanimity might easily have been a nineteenth-century evolution. In the family to which Prusias comes are two sons, one of military leanings, the other a student. Into the ear of the latter Prusias whispers the real purpose of his coming to Italy. He is an Armenian and in league with Mithridates for the reduction of Roman rule. The unity which the Senate has tried to extend to the freshly-conquered provinces of Italy is a thing of slow growth. Prusias by his strategy and helped by Mithridates's gold, hopes to organize slaves and disaffected provincials into a force which will oblige weakened Rome to make terms, one of which shall be complete emancipation and equality of every man before the law. His harangues are in lofty strain, and, save that he never takes the coarse, belligerent tone of our contemporaries, these speeches might have been made by one of our own Abolitionists. The one point that Prusias never forgets is personal dignity and a regal consideration for his friends. But after all, this son of the gods is befooled by a woman, a sinuous and transcendently ambitious Roman belle, the second wife of the dull and trustful prefect of Capua; for this tiny woman had all men in her net whom she found it useful to have there.

"The daughter of the prefect—hard, homely-featured, and hating the supple stepmother with an unspeakable hate, tearing her beauty at last like a tigress and so causing her death—is a repulsive but very strong figure. The two brothers who range themselves on opposite sides in the servile war make another unforgettable picture; and the beautiful slave Brenna, who follows her noble lover into camp, is a spark of light against the lurid background. The servile movement is combined with the bold plans of the Thracian Spartacus. He is a good figure and perpetually surprises us with his keen foresight and disciplinary power.

"The book is stirring, realistic in the even German way, and full of the fibre and breath of its century." *Boston Ev'g Transcript.*